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to quote:



MANLY BANISTER

At the age of twenty, I probably could have written a fine, fat autobiography. A couple of decades later have added perspective and have reduced some things that once loomed large into mere vanishing points.

College time for me was at the beginning of the rough old Depression. I put in one year at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, and that was the end of my higher education.

In the course of knocking around, I put in quite a few years writing for radio in the Midwest, then drifted into advertising, where I stayed for quite a few more years.

Meanwhile, War II had happened to the world, so I enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve, taking boot training at Parris Island. Later, I spent some time at the Marine Base at Hadnot Point, North Carolina, followed by overseas duty with the Sixth Marine Division in the Pacific. After I had stormed around on Okinawa, the war ended, and I went back to the Midwest and advertising.

I sold my first story a long time ago, a piece of juvenile fiction. For a time, I did quite a bit of fiction and article writing for the juveniles as a sideline. I've also done articles for photo and how-to magazines, having published considerable material in the field of hand bookbinding, one of my more consistent indoor sports.

I used to contribute fantasy to *Weird Tales* before that magazine passed away, and have been published in *Beyond Fantasy Fiction* and *Galaxy Science Fiction*, as well as in *Astounding*.

Although I published my first book in hard covers back in 1939, *The Scarlet Saint* is my first attempt at book-length science fiction. The total of my published novels, of all types, has now reached the astonishing level of two.

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Cover EDWARD VALIGUESKY

Editor
HOWARD BROWNE

Art Editor
HERBERT BOGOFF



the observatory

by The Editor



• It has been predicted by experts—and you'd be surprised how many experts there are in this world—that the TV set will eventually supplant the printed page; that in time reading will become a lost art, a casualty to the 21-inch screens in all our living rooms.

Could be.

We admit it, not because we believe it, but because we t' it's rather a waste of time to jump clubfooted on someone's prediction merely because our children might str to death if the prediction proved accurate. After all, they're brave little tykes and they'd face up to it.

No, our reaction is one of sadness; pity for the children (and adults) of the future if such a horror came to pass.

And why do we pity them? Because we firmly believe no medium now devised or yet conceived is or ever will be capable of supplanting the printed page. That's a pretty fat sentence. Let us illustrate:

You pick up a copy of Burroughs' *The Princess of Mars*. You begin reading. You become enthralled with the action and the descriptive passages and a magic result. A magic made possible because your mind takes over where Burroughs left off. In essence Burroughs says: "Here is an exotic setting for an adventure. Here are some characters. Now let your own mind, your own imagination, take over and expand them as you will."

And that is exactly what your mind and imagination do. John Carter becomes a towering, godlike figure; the beauty of Dejah Thoris so breathtaking no picture could ever reflect it, because the picture your own mind creates would never submit to the restriction of camera, pen or brush.

In short, the printed word is the only medium with which a picture *without limits* can be drawn. And the printed word is able to produce unlimited pictures only in cooperation with your imagination. As a matter of fact, you do most of the work.

An example: You read the Tarzan books. As a result you have in your memory a picture of Tarzan, the fabulous ape-man; a picture that is all your own because you created it. Not Mr. Burroughs. He merely helped.

And in your heart you were vastly disappointed when you went to your local theater and saw Johnny Weissmuller swing around on previously tested studio ropes and emitting weird gargles. Admit it—you said to yourself: Hey, this ain't my Tarzan! This is just a well-built guy trying to act like him. Because your Tarzan is a superman and no mere mortal could portray him.

Thus the child of tomorrow will be beggared indeed because his heroes will be ready-made and presented to him through his eyes rather than through his mind. As an example, take Superman. Delivered through the printed word, he is just that because your imagination creates him. On the TV screen he's an almost laughable caricature in tight-fitting pants that show his knobby knees and a pair of shoulders almost any wrestler on TV would break off and hand to him.

Seriously, it comes down to this: When you look at a picture, you've had it. There it is. Take it or leave it. Like it or don't like. But if you don't like it, your imagination can't help you. If you want a hero to your own specifications go over in the corner and create him. But without men like Burroughs and Robert Louis Stevenson and the like to start you off, you probably won't get far.

So TV has its place; that we do not dispute. But don't compare it with the printed page. It just ain't the same. Movies come a little closer; you don't have the spell broken by somebody shouting about the pleasures of inhaling his particular brand of tar, or some dame in five feet of makeup extolling the orgiastic pleasures in her make of lipstick. But no motion picture can do for you what your own imagination can accomplish.—HB.



Meet Kar Danoy, the Scarlet Saint. He is Rth's only hope for survival!

Beginning a four-part serial . . .

THE SCARLET SAINT

By MANLY BANISTER

The Editors of Amazing Stories take sincere pleasure and pride in offering its readers the first installment of a 70,000- word novel, written in the style and featuring the tremendous characters which epitomized the Golden Age of science fiction. The wealth of descriptive detail, the exciting action and pace, the painstaking construction of plot—all are here, to make your reading The Scarlet Saint an unforgettable experience.



CHAPTER I

AFTER nineteen years, this was the day of days for Kor Dansy. As he had expected, the day dawned clear and bright. Almost every day on Rth was clear; almost every day was bright . . . as bright as a turgid, blood-red Sun could make it, shining in a dry, cloudless sky that mellowed from almost black at the zenith to a deep indigo at the horizon. In their season, minus-magnitude stars like Sirius and Antares appeared as blazing spicules of light at high noon.

Rth's bare bones, scoured and whitened by desert winds, grisly relics that had long ago worked through the withered flesh of the planet, sucked at the Sun's waning heat, stored it for radiation in the bitter night, when even frost would have softened the cold.

In places, of course, soil, humus, desiccated vegetation, and precious moisture still clung obstinately to the brittle chassis of an ancient world. People still toiled for their daily bread, and other people enjoyed the cake distributed to them by the Trisz . . . the benevolent Trisz. . . .

Kor always awoke easily, but the subconscious prompting was even more effective this morning. He lay blinking on the stone-slab floor of his quarters in the Institute of Manhood.

He thought of his first morning at the Institute—when he was six—and he had awakened in this same room, cold, stiff, and tearful. Nineteen years of rigorously practiced sleeping routine had conditioned childish frailties out of his body. The stone on which he lay was hollowed by the restless movements of generations of learners at the Institute. To sleep on harsh stone was pure luxury, after the gruelling periods of drill and training to which the initiate Men were subjected.

It was morning in late spring, with no sign of an impending sand storm. A fine day, Kor thought, for the Examination which marked his last day at the Institute.

There was no such thing as failure of the Examination . . . those who lived through it were the ones who did not fail.

From where Kor lay against the wall, wrapped in his warm blue cloak, he could look out through the glassless window-opening into the deep indigo sky. The color was like a backdrop against which, in harsh contrast, a small bit of a poplar was to be seen, as it lifted its fluttering crown in a green-gold greeting to the day's first sun.

Hail the Sun! Lord of creation! The ritual phrases drifted through Kor's mind. Protector . . . Defender . . . Shield . . . Arm, . . .

Even though Kor didn't believe in the ritual or in the symbol of the Sun, it did not seem right to him that he should concern himself with the Sacred Litany of the People while lying abed. The ritual had been drilled into him these nineteen years past. It was a part of his every action and reaction—a cloak and a shield at once, a cover for the work he was trained to perform . . . after today had proved his fitness for it.

Kor bounded to his feet, shedding his cloak like a chrysalis, and finished the ritual at the window, in com-

pany with the Sacred Exercises that flexed and toned every muscle in his lean, powerful young body. A golden giant, Kor stood there, methodically exercising as laid down in Mechanics of Ritual, Section 2A, Subsection D.

His skin was golden . . . it gleamed like reddish brass in the sunlight. His hair was the sheenless, rich color of hammered gold. He had gray eyes, lean cheeks, a large nose with flaring nostrils, a full underlip, and a chin slightly rounded. He had strength and character fully representative of the Men.

He raced through the ritual easily, fitting the words and cadences to the smooth, muscular movements of the Exercises. The ritual was meaningless . . . a recorded whirly-whirl of sounds and nothing more. But here and there were words of meaning, and where the tongue tripped over senseless syllables, the mind dwelt upon the semantic interpolations . . . the hidden keys to the power of Manhood.

Desire is our scourge, and Need is our blessing. . . . He chanted the simple-minded concepts with the relish of a connoisseur of their inner meaning, and peered with bright-eyed eagerness upon the sun-drenched newness of

his world—no reminder of yesterday, but a glowing promise of tomorrow. A line of poplars tossed in the early breeze. Beyond their screen, the ruffled surface of a small lake lanced sparkles of divine flame to counterpoint the tranquil indigo of the sky-bowl.

Precious water! Water was the life-blood of Rth . . . the fluid that failed now in its subterranean veins and arteries, flowed slowly from the bowels of the earth, to vanish and return no more. Rth's seas now were stinking ponds, shrunken in girth and depth. They soon would be gone. When the Trisz removed the last precious drop . . . Kor straightened his back.

"Resolve is our armor; Will is our Weapon . . . Belief in our Lord . . . Faith in our Selves . . ."

He raised his arms aloft, hands clasped, and shook them in more than usual vehemence in the ritual Sign of the Conqueror.

From a neighboring chamber suddenly came sounds of young men laughing. Water splashed from huge amphors, cleansing their bodies, and ran down carefully chiselled channels and drains in the floor, dripped into the purification tanks in the basement,

and returned thence to the supply tanks in the loft. So rare a commodity was water that it needed to be carefully conserved . . . no more permitted to evaporate than was absolutely unavoidable.

There was plenty of water to be had at the Institute, of course. It was in the nature of the inhabitants of the Institute that there should be plenty of water. It was a pity that this plenty could not be made available to the People as well . . . but this secret was only one of many which the Institute of Manhood kept so carefully concealed from the Trisz . . . the benevolent Trisz. . . .

"Kor!" bawled a male voice from the door. "Still sleeping? . . . Ho! I see you . . . come on, Man! Clean up for the Examination! Would you take all morning to ritualize at the window?"

Kor ducked his head sheepishly, stooped and hurled his sleeping cloak at his comrade. While Jon Moran sputtered and pawed at the enveloping foks, Kor thrust laughingly by.

"We'll see who is first to wash, Jon!"

He dashed into the Lavatory where sparkling streams of cold water cascaded and splashed upon healthy young

hidea. In a moment his own glittered with sparkling streams and droplets as he scrubbed under the downpour of a tilted amphor.

They were six, these young Initiates, the largest class ever to be assembled at the Institute for graduation . . . and the best, they confidently congratulated themselves. Besides Kor and Jon Moran, there were Rik Meni, Star Rova, Lod Hareth, and Pron Sark . . . the only survivors of the hundred novitiates who had entered the Institute together as children, nineteen years before.

Novitiates entering the Institute at the age of six spent six years in physical training and in learning the rudiments of secular and religious education. For the following six years, they were termed Students, and received the harshest of physical and mental discipline in their training and studies. Those who proved deficient in physical stamina or mental acumen were at this time transferred to regularization classes for further training, leading to initiation into the Order of the Blue Brothers. The Blue Brothers were an order of the highest religious significance, acknowledging the Sun as Lord of Creation and the Protector

of the People. The Blue Brothers were the graduate priests of Rth's Sun-religion.

Few were the Students accepted into the Order of Initiates, where seven years of specialized training fitted them for initiation into the Scarlet Order of the Men. This was the prime purpose of the Institute . . . to select and train candidates for the Men . . . who were the highest type of Manhood on Rth. Their deepest mysteries were held secret against all . . . were known only to those who personally were weavers of the scarlet cloak.

Thus, the Institute was crowded to capacity with learners, but each year only the meagerest number who survived the lethal training of the Initiates attained to the coveted wearing of scarlet.

To be a Man is Greatness . . . it is Nobility . . . thought Kor, proud that he was about to become a Man.

These Initiates, save for the formality of today's Examination, actually were Men . . . clean-cut, bursting with health and energy, and their minds were such hardened, tempered, keenly edged tools as the world had never before seen. True Men, these, who bore the secret of their purpose with pride and determination.

Rth was incredibly ancient. Millions of generations of the People had come and gone upon its withering surface . . . and millenia of the Trisz. There was no actual historical record of when the Trisz had first come to Rth.

That was what the People called them—Trisz. They had no name of their own that had ever been sounded by the People or by anybody else. The world of sound was closed to the Trisz. They ruled the People and never heard them speak.

Kor Danay had never seen a Trisz, not even a picture of one. No picture could have portrayed the Trisz . . . no photograph . . . no effort from an artist's hand. One word described the Trisz better than ten thousand pictures could have shown . . . they looked as their name sounds—Trisz . . . the name a muted sibilance, their appearance an illusory refraction of light, a flutter upon the retina, as the morning wind was a ruffle upon the Institute lake.

Kor could afford to be leisurely with his dressing. There would be no breakfast for the examinees this morning. Nor was fast to be broken until the Sun had set upon the day of Examination.

Keeping the fast was ritual,

as the Examination was ritual. It was physical and mental discipline, attuned to the asceticism to which the Men were trained. No Man could fail this Examination, except that he destroyed himself fulfilling the requirements. It was well that, if he could not pass, a Man be destroyed, for there was no room among the Men for a failure, and no place for him among the People. Moreover, his destruction might provide valuable information that would serve in the teaching of future Men.

For the last time, Kor drew on the blue regalia of the Institute . . . silken blue hose of gossamer woven plastic, blue leather buskins that wrapped up his calves, jerkin of blue leather, sleeveless and laced at the front. Finally, Kor threw over his shoulders the rippling cloak of the Weavers of the Blue, the same garment worn by the Blue Brotherhood, but embroidered with the deeper-toned insignia of the Institute—uplifted hands clasped in the Sign of the Conqueror. It was almost with reverence that Kor clothed himself in these nearly sacred garments . . . the next time he dressed, his color would be scarlet.

Only the Outlanders of Rth bore arms . . . thin, rapier-like weapons or daggers. Anything

more dangerous was forbidden by the Trisz, except for the troops of the regional Lords, who handled sword, spear and bow with equal facility. The terrible blasters of the Trisz were prohibited . . . reserved exclusively for the elite city guards of Triszmen.

Weaponless, therefore, Kor swished into the hall, already clamorous with the others of his class. They paired into ranks and marched solemnly down the hall, out of the building, across a rippling sward of blue grass and into the arena where the Masters of Examination already awaited them.

This was exciting, Kor thought. How grand and noble to be a Man! Things had been different in antiquity, he knew. He could not be sure how different, or in what way. History passed back across two Ages of Ice, and before that it was very, very dim. It was said in their texts—though taken with a grain of salt in these enlightened times—that once all of the People had called themselves Men. It was certain that none of them had been Men. To be a Man was a special privilege and a product of arduous training of mind and body. It was not taken for granted, nor even

generally believed, that any before the latter-day Men possessed the kind of minds the Men had, nor even their god-like physical attributes.

All of the Men were tall, handsome, unbelievably strong and capable. These Men were unique in Time; for being a Man was a way of life, a matter of training and natural aptitude combined, of science and belief welded into the beautiful weapon that was a Man.

It was a religion, actually, to be a Man, and the Men were suffered by the Trisz to exist as an ancient institution that brought religion to the People. Nominally, the Men were the spiritual leaders of the People, including the Triszmen, though the latter naturally owed their allegiance to the Trisz, and not to the secular authority of a regional lord, or to a mythical deity such as the Lord Sun.

The sociological aspect of this latter-day Rth was a peculiar one . . . a complication of treading down and being downtrodden. The Trisz on top, then the Triszmen, and at the bottom—the People. Although Kor had not traveled, physically, so much as a yard into the world beyond the limits of the Institute, his teachers had kept him well inform-

ed of the state of things. Since the novitiate left the world at the age of six, it was necessary that he be kept informed in order to re-enter it at the conclusion of his training.

It was not only the thought of his pending return that sent a delicious shudder of anticipation through Kor. He had a secret of his own . . . one which he felt was of great importance to every Man, and ultimately, to the People and to Rth. Today's examination would reveal that secret . . . a specialized ability the young Initiate had assiduously practiced in his years of study and drill.

The Men had developed the highest type of double mind in the Universe . . . a mind that gave them complete mastery of their environment to the nth degree. So far, only Kor knew that his own mind, developing a latent function peculiar to itself, had gone beyond even the far-reaching mental development of the Men. Kor's was not only a double, but a separable mind!

The Initiates stood stiffly at attention before the rostrum erected in the center of the athletic field. The green-clad elder Men who were the Masters stood grouped upon the stand, murmuring last-minute details among themselves.

Tor Shan, Supreme Master of the Institute, turned from his colleagues and faced the junior Men below. His was an imposing figure, tall, muscular, cheeks clean-shaven, eyes dark under startling brows, his bristling hair sparsely shot with gray. Tor Shan was over two centuries old, but he appeared not over fifty, as age is recognized among the People. He wore the brilliant green accoutrements of the Institute Masters.

"Men . . ." His words came slowly and clearly. "You are the one hundred sixty-first class I have helped graduate from the Institute." He smiled gravely. "I was assistant instructor at the first graduation I attended functionally. There were two Men in that class. There are six in this . . . the largest class ever graduated at one time by any of the Institutes."

It was true, then, Kor thought. Although Blue Brothers were graduated by the hundreds all over the world each year, few were those who became Men. Kor flung his glance around the empty, tiered stone seats of the Arena. A week ago the Blue Brothers had conducted their ceremony here and then had gone out to their Chapels in

the world of the People. He had watched that graduation. But there were no spectators for this one. A special force field now surrounded the entire area, effectively preventing entry even by the Trisz. This examination would be conducted in secret.

The twenty-one who had accompanied Kor into the ranks of Initiate had dwindled until now there were only six. Would they still be six when the setting Sun permitted breaking of the ritual fast? The course of the Examination was hard and dangerous, and many classes of two or three members failed to struggle through the day.

"... You have been impressed with the fact that your training has been conducted in secret," Tor Shan continued clearly. "No one outside the Brotherhood of Men knows of your training, your capabilities, or your aims. You know what you have been trained for—the world does not. The welfare of the People is in your charge... your work is for them, regardless of how they, in their ignorance, may work against you. It has been said that once, in ages before the Trisz, the world was peopled only by the race of Man. Rth shall again become a world of Men alone.

The people are our sacred trust. To free them and Rth of the Trisz and to lift the People again to the stature of Men is our sworn and solemn duty."

Tor Shan concluded his brief speech, announced the order of the Examination, and turned the procedure over to a junior Master.

First came the Games, followed by the Contests. These were strictly physical affairs, of course. The Initiates contended with each other, in pairs and in groups. The Games tested their manual skill, their coordination of mind and muscle. In the Contests, they pitted themselves against each other in wrestling, boxing, fencing, racing, and jumping. The exertion of their struggles tuned verily their bodies, brought their minds alive to the hazardous Challenges that lay ahead, which they must grasp and defy with all the might of their minds and wills.

After a period of relaxation, Tor Shan called Kor to the rostrum.

"Are you ready for your first Challenge?"

Kor nodded stiffly. "Yes, Sir."

"Good. I can tell you nothing about your problem in advance. The Challenges have

been carefully thought out, and are the result of centuries of experiment. They are intended to bring out the best you have at your command. You have ten seconds in which to adjust your mind to the first Challenge."

CHAPTER II

KOR staggered in slippery ooze. The exchange had been appallingly swift . . . instantaneous.

Around him, primeval ferns hurled fronded tops into low-lying mist that streamed in the humid wind, mirrored themselves in stagnant scum-ridden ponds. The fear of rotting humus, of a dank, watery wastescape cloyed at his nostrils.

Off to Kor's right, something began to splash heavily in the streaming mists. A bellying scream of agony quivered giant ferns, rippled the swamp ponds. Ooze belched noisome exhalations of gas. A struggle was taking place between unseen, monstrous beasts of this primeval world. Kor's conscious mind was aware of the tumult, the stench, the dreary surroundings. His superconscious mind quivered with anticipation of something else, picked up the calm voice of Tor Shan, speak-

ing in tones of infinite calm.

"Kor, you have been transported to a young planet, located somewhere in our own galaxy. I may not give you its galactic co-ordinates. It will be your Challenge to return to us here on Rth . . . to the exact spot in the arena from which you were transported. The time allowed for this is three point two seconds. You will be credited with five points if you return in this time, ten points if in less, two-and-a-half points if more. A return to any point in the Solar System, requiring re-orientation for the final return is worth only two points . . . two-and-a-half points for a similar return elsewhere on Rth. Time begins when you hear the pseudo-sound of the gong."

The Master spoke only in Kor's superconscious mind, the marvelous instrument forged in the training of the Men. Far away . . . it seemed to Kor that a muted gong chimed melodiously. He had 3.2 seconds in which to orientate himself, select the swiftest orbit home, and to appear before the Masters in the arena.

The simplest Challenges came first, of course.

Silence flashed across the primitive world. Ferns and

rippled marsh-ponds presented an appearance of frozen, stroboscopic rigidity. It seemed as if Time had suddenly fled from this world, crystalizing this ultimate moment into timelessness.

Kor's training had stressed speed of reaction. His double, separable mind automatically assumed control of its environment. Kor was living fast now, so fast that he could grow old and die before Tor Shan could step down from the rostrum.

Time was a matter of how you were adjusted to it, Kor thought fleetingly, satisfied with the immediate response of his superconscious mind. It only seemed that a stasis of time seized the surroundings. Actually, every electron in his body vibrated at a tremendous cyclic rate, speeding up his perception of Time. His body was matter beyond matter, wholly subject to his own will . . . cast completely out of the time-rate of the Universe. It owed no allegiance whatsoever to the laws that bound material cause to material effect.

"Desire is our scourge . . ." Kor thought, arrowing upward through the now-solid mists that shrouded this world. A high-cycle passage opened ahead of him as he

forged through and out of the atmosphere, into the vacuum of space. *"Need is our blessing. . . ."* The planet was a golden disc, distant in space, like a brassy shield, hung upon an ebony wall. Stars glittered with cold fury in far immensities.

Kor checked their alignment and distribution with a cold, reasoning analysis. It was impossible to recognize their appearance, or to attempt a spectral analysis while he was in this state of time-stasis. The light which reached his senses was distorted, stepped up in its own cyclic rate of vibration. Analysis of the starlight could tell him nothing.

Kor drifted in timelessness. There was neither heat nor cold in this state. Airlessness was a condition without meaning. No longer matter in the accepted sense, his body did not require oxygen or pressure. It drew its furious needs from the inexhaustible store of sub-etheric energy tapped by his mind.

Kor relaxed and let his mind expand. His ultra perceptions snapped outward, spiralling logarithmically toward the ultimate reaches of the galaxy. A "sound" cut across on the high-abstract level of percep-

tion . . . a shrill, high whistling that went on and on in a steady, unvarying note. Kor recognized it. The sound signified Trisz, a mental wave length held featureless in the time-stop.

Impressions poured through his mind. Matter . . . here, there, everywhere . . . planets, suns, aimlessly drifting planetoids. Kor searched more widely, receiving, sorting, classifying. He eliminated the regions that obviously were not the one he sought.

A hundred light years . . . five hundred . . . a thousand. Three thousand-odd light years away, a familiar, low buzz caught his attention. He mentalized a shift in the time-warped that held him and thrilled to the momentary, excited *chirp-chirp-chirp* into which the signal developed.

Again Kor shifted the lever of his conscious mind against his superconsciousness. The Universe blacked out. Racing atoms spiralled and coruscated before his perceptions. He shifted once more, sorting, seeking, classifying, rejecting . . . out of the darkness sprang the tiered stone seats of the arena, the assembled Examination Masters. Tor Shane stood on the rostrum, holding an electronic stop-watch. He drew in a slow breath. His

nostrils dilated as he smiled with a pleased expression.

"One point oh three seconds, Kor. You have done well!"

Kor had a right to be proud of his score in the Examination. The extra points he earned were owing to his swift, facile mind . . . proving itself superior to even the super-sharp standards set by the Men.

The Initiates went through their Challenges singly, Kor with mounting excitement as the ease and speed of his accomplishments dazzled even himself. His second Challenge took him to the heart of the Andromeda nebula, to return with a cubic centimetre of the vacuum held at the core of that supernal mass of stars. His third Challenge was to visit seven planets whose locations were known only to Tor Shan, and to bring back from each a specimen of its rocky core, correctly labeled. His time to accomplish this last Challenge was only seven-tenths of a second, and most of that time was gone before Kor succeeded in breaking the shield Tor Shan threw across his mind.

Finally, the long day of Challenges drew to a close. The westering Sun cast long shadows across the floor of

the arena. Tor Shan held up his hand.

"The Examination is concluded," he said, and Kor experienced a thrill of disappointment. He had been certain that Tor Shan would require a demonstration of the Fire Out of Heaven. This was Kor's cherished secret. The theory of the Fire had long ago been mathematically demonstrated by the Men, but none had ever achieved its control . . . until he, Kor Danay, had learned to control it. He opened his mouth to protest, but Tor Shan preceded him by a word.

"However," he continued in his calm, peaceful voice, "at this point in the Examination, opportunity is given the Initiates to demonstrate what has romantically been called the Fire Out of Heaven. You have studied its laws, and are aware of what it means, but no Man has ever successfully controlled the Fire. To attempt to control it and to fail means instant, sure destruction. You are cautioned to think carefully before volunteering to attempt such a demonstration. You will be required to demonstrate separately, in remote sections of the galaxy from each other, for the action must take place far from the usual trade lanes

of the Trisz. A Master will accompany each Initiate for the purpose of observing the Challenge. If none of you choose to demonstrate, it is quite as well as if you had. It is a possibility that no mind will ever learn to control the Fire."

Quiet settled over the arena. Kor lifted his hand.

"Sir . . . I should like to demonstrate the Challenge!"

Tor Shan nodded. "Very well"

John Moran spoke up. "And I, Sir!"

"Any others?" Tor Shan roved his calm gaze over the Initiates. No other volunteered. "That is good. You others may return to your quarters and prepare for the ceremonial breaking of fast."

Kor's heart thudded painfully as the four Initiates filed out of the arena. They were his classmates . . . his friends. Would he ever see them again? Jon Moran lifted clasped hands in the ritual Sign of the Conqueror and grinned at Kor. Kor suddenly grinned in return, lifted his own hands in the Sign.

"Tor Shan," Kor said, "I should like your company at the Challenge."

The Master inclined his head in acknowledgment.

It was dark as the eternal night of Space on the planet to which Tor Shan took himself and Kor. The surface was a frozen rubble of volcanic ash and great, tumbled slabs of glassy obsidian that carved ebon gaps in the clotted stars of the galactic perimeter. Almost directly overhead, a singular star blazed with the intensity of a carbon arc . . . the far-off sun of this abysmal and nighted planet.

There was no air to breathe. Their bodies vibrated in time-stasis. Kor touched his mind to that of the Master.

"Sir . . . yonder is a high mountain. Please retire to its summit for your personal safety. Break all mental contact with me, for I must work alone."

Tor Shan expostulated. "How can I observe if I do not hold contact with you? If your demonstration should fail, I must be in a position to learn."

Kor bore him down with the force of his obstinacy.

"No! I have worked out all the equations on the cybernograph, Sir, and I believe that there is something in the additional mind which introduces an aberration."

"Kor . . . have you performed the demonstration in secret?"

"Yes, Sir. I have successfully drawn the Fire Out of Heaven!"

"Very well. I withdraw."

Kor let his mind expand. His superconsciousness whipped outward like an uncoiling steel spring, surging with released power.

Tor Shan retired to the mountain top as directed. He watched the desolate plain where Kor stood, but Kor knew that he could not be seen by the sense of physical sight alone. What he was about to do would be seen, though.

Kor looked down. His conscious mind floated miles above the glassy, ash-covered plain. His eyes were on the surface, with his body, but Kor had other senses to serve him. He perceived himself far below, poised like an athlete. He no longer had direct contact with his own superconsciousness, but through a secondary channel, the impressions of that lonely figure filtered through to him.

He sensed the mighty effort of mind that went into the drawing together of universal forces. The figure of himself staggered with strain. Kor Danay was wholly divorced from that figure; he was only an observer of the robot he had set in motion.

This was the crux of his

secret, Kor acknowledged . . . this ability of his to separate the twin factors of his mind. The presence of even his own ego in the performance of this superlative task introduced aberrations into the elaborate forces of mind which wove and re-wove in his superconsciousness. His separable mind was Kor's answer to the problem.

Kor's superconsciousness drove like a physical thing across the gap of space to the sun of this peopleless world. Even with his minds separated as they were, Kor felt the shock of the contact.

Distant, distant that sun. It was only by virtue of supraliminal perception that Kor was aware of what occurred on its seething surface, the violence of the storms that began to rage in its atmosphere. A whirlpool of energy sucked upward from the surface, controlled and directed by the power of Kor's unleashed mind.

The lonely, wooden figure on the airless plain moved stiffly. Its arm rose, hurled forward . . . and a river of scarlet flame gushed across the eerie landscape. Volcanic upthrusts, frozen for an eternity in the endless chill of space, showered sparks, toppled, melted into magma and

flowed in the torrent of flame.

The scene blotted out. Kor and Tor Shan stood again in the arena of the Institute of Manhood on Rth.

"You could smash the Solar System with that power," the Master observed calmly at last; but it was apparent that he restrained himself with difficulty.

"Or the Galaxy!" Kor murmured softly to himself.

CHAPTER III

THE ceremonial breakfast was conducted in silence, for only five graduates were on hand. Jon Moran had not returned, nor had the Master who accompanied him. Perhaps their lifeless bodies sprawled on some cold, airless stone in outermost space, crumbs of ice, shattered by the forces they had tried to control. Or perhaps, Kor thought, ten thousand years from now, a nova might blaze in the night sky of Rth, heralding a news long buried in the mists of Time, that a Man had given his life for the Brotherhood of Men.

Concluding the meal, the graduate Men returned to their quarters to don the scarlet garments that had been laid out for them in their absence. They were Men now

and entitled to wear the regalia of Men.

Kor sought to dull the ache of grieving for his friend. It is glorious to die for the cause of Men, he thought, but more glorious still to live for it. *Resolve is our armor; Will is our weapon.* . . . He murmured the ritualistic babble, seeking comfort in its hidden interpolations.

In the Audience Hall of the Administration Building, the Masters awaited the graduate classmen. The latter filed in, splendid-looking in their garments and robes of scarlet, and took places close to the front. Tor Shan rose.

"Men . . ." He welcomed them into the Brotherhood, spoke briefly on their scholastic records, then went on, "What I have to tell you now will be received sadly by you. You will wonder why you have been required to attain to the lengths you have, why you have learned to control the vast powers of your minds . . . when it is possible that none of you will ever be permitted to use those powers."

He paused to let his words sink in. Kor heard the sound of the words, but their import did not strike him at once. When it did, he felt himself tighten inside. He cast a startled glance at his fellow Men.

"You are about to be given the Oath of Manhood," Tor Shan continued evenly. "You are expected to obey its conditions. There are sound reasons behind the Oath—it will be easy to see why it is necessary, but not so easy to see how you can live up to it. But live up to it you must, if the Brotherhood of Men is to survive and reach its ultimate goal—the liberation of the Universe. Stand up, now, and repeat the Oath after me."

The five men stood up mechanically, held clasped hands aloft, and repeated the phrases of the ritual Oath after Tor Shan.

"I do solemnly vow . . . never in vanity or in pride . . . to demonstrate my powers . . . to any living thing . . . nor to use my powers against any of the People . . . except that my life be in danger . . . nor against any of the Trisz. This I most solemnly swear . . . that I will face death before the Trisz . . . and will let my life be lost . . . rather than disclose the secret powers of the Men to them. I sanctify myself here and now . . . in the service of God and Rth . . . in the race of People and Men. I accept my responsibilities in the world as a minister of spiritual comfort . . . and promise to discharge my duties as befits a Man . . .

to hold the Chapel sacred and inviolate . . . and the Chapel of my body . . . I shall keep chaste and pure . . . for the space of one year from this graduation. . . . "

There was more — much more. Kor intoned the words dismally, feeling that he had been cheated, if not robbed. Why those nineteen years, just to become a high priest of the mythical Lord Sun? Better if he should at least be allowed to preach the truth, instead of that antiquated clap-trap. But there was a reason. There had to be. The Men could not preach truth to the People without revealing their own true nature to the Trisz. That was why they deliberately clung to the miserable ritual, why the Blue Brotherhood were trained to expound it learnedly, in full belief of its truth. The religion was the only contact the Men had with all the People, for religion was the only universal contact permitted by the Trisz.

Tor Shan explained these things after the formula had been recited. The Oath was given to prevent deviation from a strict line of conduct by the Men. Any other conduct would jeopardize, if not defeat, the purpose of the Brotherhood.

A foolish demonstration of their powers would awaken the Trisz to the danger that confronted them. They would be sure to retaliate with an endeavor to wipe out the Men. And it could be done, as Tor Shan assured them.

Their role as protectors of the People was enhanced by the prohibition contained in the Oath, for the People of Rth were unorganized—divided into hundreds of restless tribes that warred among themselves. A Man who permitted himself to be swayed by regional jealousies to the point of taking part in these internecine struggles, could succeed only in revealing the nature and purpose of the Brotherhood to the Trisz, who not only condoned these wars among their subjects, but actually encouraged them.

It all revolved around the same theme—the specialized powers of the Men must not be revealed to the Trisz.

"The Trisz are a totally alien life form," Tor Shan explained. "No one knows how many Trisz there are, or if the Trisz might be only one. We know the Trisz is a self-contained energy-form, which does not explain them at all. We do know this, though, that even if there are many Trisz, it is as if there

were only one. It is believed that somewhere in the Universe there is a planet inhabited by the parent body, to which all Trisz are anchored by hyperspatial filaments of mind. Therefore, what one Trisz may observe is instantly known to all Trisz everywhere throughout the Universe, a local Trisz being merely an extension of the parent body.

"You see, then, how impossible it would be to destroy the Trisz one at a time. In order to do so, we must find the Trisz' home planet and destroy it entirely with the parent body. Until we do find that planet, we must take extreme care."

Slowly, Kor's understanding grasped a mental picture of a vast world whirling through space in some remote island universe . . . a distant and unknown galaxy. This world was the home of the Trisz. Or perhaps there was no world at all—just an invisible cloud of Trisz-energy hovering somewhere in the eternal darkness of space.

Men secretly combed the reaches of space for that home of the Trisz, Tor Shan told them, and hinted at further secret activities of the Men, but firmly closed his lips upon all details.

He abruptly changed the subject and spoke glowingly of Kor's accomplishment, his drawing the Fire Out of Heaven. But his voice was sad as he confessed that the ability was Kor's alone because, to his knowledge, only Kor had the unique type of separable mind that seemed to be required. At least, the experience had pointed the way to further study. It might take centuries to adapt Men to the separable kind of intelligence which Kor resorted to instinctively.

Tor Shan brightened suddenly and spoke fondly to them. "Somebody, however, Men shall prevail over the Trisz. Perhaps you very Men. Therefore, I bid you farewell with love and with hope for the future. In the morning each will receive his assignment and will be dispatched to duty in the world of the People and the Trisz. Return now to your quarters."

It was not so much that Kor resented his assignment to No-ka-si, the human settlement adjacent to the Trisz stronghold of Ka-si. He had at least hoped for preferential treatment because of his handiness with the Fire Out of Heaven. After all, did he not know about the Searchers

who combed space for the lair of the Trisz? His own father had been one of them, had given his life in the search for that needle in the galactic haystack. His grandfather, father of his father, had destroyed himself in a sea of seething flames while experimenting with drawing the Fire Out of Heaven.

If any Man deserved an honorable post of hair-raising adventure, Kor thought, surely he was that Man. Tor Shan sympathized with his views.

"There is an ancient saying," he observed with deep calm, "to the effect that he also serves who only stands and waits. Be patient, my son. The life of a Man is long. I myself have lived more than ten generations of the People. No excuse has yet been found for not living to the end of Time—except accident. The Men are somehow . . . prone to accident."

He tugged at his chin thoughtfully.

"You know our methods of extrapolation. Have you extrapolated your own future yet?"

"I hadn't thought of it," Kor confessed. "The practice always seemed a little confusing to me, and of little value. We used to play at it, as Initiates, but one day was much

like the next and we soon tired of it."

"Let me tell you something," Tor Shan said seriously. "It is a faculty you would do well to cultivate. We must strive constantly to be the equal of the Trisz, if not their better. Many of the things which you have been taught would be considered heavenly miracles by the People, but familiar mind-mechanics to the Trisz. In many things we barely match their ability. In others—you especially in regard to the Fire—we outmatch them. In still others, they are our masters. Extrapolation, for instance."

"The Trisz extrapolate?"

"They have machines which extrapolate for them. That is why you are being sent to No-ka-si." He paused, peered keenly at the younger Man. Kor stirred with quickened interest.

"You have learned something of the social order of the People and the Trisz," the old Master went on. "You have been shown how the Trisz rule through internal disruption of human civilization. The culture of the People of today is at a lower level than ever during the tenure of the Trisz. The People are divided into small, regional

units, communications stifled, rivalries bred, education impeded. When such a situation obtains, a civilization tends to retrogress instead of advance. Human civilization on this planet has been swiftly moving backward. When I was a boy, steam locomotives still were in use on this continent. Today, the horse and wagon have replaced it in the long-distance transportation of freight and passengers.

"As a Man, you are familiar with the brilliant technology of the Men. This technology rivals that of the Trisz; we know, because we are familiar with the ways of the Trisz. Our technology has been an aid in your training. It has helped you to develop the double mind of a Man, equipped to rationalize in third-order methods of reasoning. It has done more, in your case, by developing the separable quality of your mind. Also, our technology has made your training possible by effectively cancelling out the inquisitive spy-rays of the Trisz, which are always focussed on the Institutes throughout the world. It would not have been enough merely to shield ourselves from the spy-rays; we cannot even let the Trisz know that we know how to shield our-

selves from his rays. We impress upon his spy-beams, therefore, recorded scenes of the kind we want the Trisz to view . . . giving an entirely false picture of the Institute.

"To the Trisz, therefore—and it goes without saying, to the Triszmen as well—we are only a religious sect of praying monks. Yet, our position is not one of complete trust." He laughed shortly. "Suspicion is the prime virtue of the tyrant. The Trisz rule upon thousands—if not millions—of worlds where they are considerably less than welcome. They maintain their position solely through nourishing the kind of suspicion that calls for eternal watchfulness.

"The Trisz possess a high order of intelligence. They are a race unto themselves, completely alien. And we are as alien to them as they are to us. It is a feat of reason to be able to outguess your own species, to outguess an alien is an extremely difficult mental exercise. To help themselves outguess us, the Trisz long ago developed a machine, a super-extension of our electronic cybernograph. One is installed in every principal Trisz city on Rth, and in every similar location in the Universe.

"It is called the Extrapolation

tor. Its diet is a daily stream of sociological data that keeps its mechanical 'mind' stuffed with the latest concerns and affairs of each district. The brain of the machine sorts, classifies, and evaluates all such data and files it in its memory sectors. When questions concerning the future trend of events are put to the machine, it is enabled to draw remarkably shrewd conclusions that amount to an ability actually to foretell the future."

"This machine must be important to me," Kor observed, "or you would not tell me about it."

Tor Shan smiled.

"The Ka-si Extrapolator has predicted you, Kor."

"Sir!"

"We have our spies—we know almost everything we wish to know about the Trisz. Our spies lurk among the Triszmen—the physical hands and bodies of the Trisz—human beings who have sold themselves for hire to the conqueror. Unfortunately, most of these slaves—these Triszmen—love their chains. They offer allegiance to the Trisz and treason to their own for the privileges the Trisz offer them. It is chiefly these you will need to be cautious of in the world. You will have

to learn to anticipate them in order to live long."

Kor interrupted. "You said the Ka-si Extrapolator has predicted me!"

"So our spies have informed us."

"How could the machine have predicted me?"

Tor Shan shrugged. "It is only obvious to us that it has, Kor. We can not know how great is the mass of material that has been fed for centuries to the Extrapolator. Its factual knowledge must be greater than the combined knowledge of all the brains in the Universe—with an added, tireless facility at sorting and classifying to enable it to draw from the mass at will to predict the future.

"Kor, you objected once to the confusing aspect of our method of extrapolation. The Extrapolator seems to have its own difficulties on this same score. It never makes a forthright statement that such-and-such is bound to occur at a given time. It couches its conclusions in symbolic, almost mystic terms, something like the oracles which tradition says spoke to the People in the hidden past.

"The Trisz present the problem of a local uprising to

their machine as a persistent routine check. Many times the prediction given by the Extrapolator has resulted in smashing minor local defections of officials, has shown up petty embezzlements, chicaneries, or a troublesome feud. The machine has so far proved its value to the Trisz. They will hardly overlook its latest pronouncement."

"That is—?"

"'Beware, O Trisz, the Scarlet Saint, to Ka-si brings a dangerous taint,' " quoted Tor Shan. "I told you the utterance of the machine tends toward the mystic or symbolic. The Men are often called Scarlet Saints by the People. This local See has been recently vacated. A new Man is required in the position.

"We do not yet understand the full potentiality of your peculiar, separable mind. Our preliminary observation tends to suggest that you might be an extremely dangerous antagonist for the Trisz. Therefore, you must be the one to go to Ka-si."

"The future is difficult to predict because it can be changed," Kor observed sagely. "If you should send me to Nwok or Lun—what then?"

"Of course the future can be changed," Tor Shan nodded agreement. "Prescience af-

fords the opportunity to introduce aberrating factors into the trend of events. But there are three reasons, at least, why we don't want to change this prediction, Kor. First, to send another Man than yourself would be to endanger his life uselessly. The Trisz are alerted by their Extrapolator, and they would destroy him. His Oath would leave him helpless to defend himself. Second, if another Man were sent, you may be sure the Trisz would investigate him thoroughly. If they should find that he was indeed no danger to them, they would suspect us of introducing an aberrant. You can see where that would lead. And third, Kor, we are very anxious to follow this probability to its end. We should like to see, if you will, just how dangerous you can be to the Trisz—and still live!"

Kor drew a deep breath. The picture was suddenly clear. Here was a greater opportunity to come to grips with the Trisz than he would find among the Searchers combing space for some alleged home-planet. That, too, might come in time, but here and now he had the opportunity to face, forewarned, a situation that could only lead to an intense personal strug-

gle with the enemy. Kor was cheered and heartened.

CHAPTER IV

THE carriage was a miserable conveyance. A pot-bellied diligence style, it had high iron-shod wheels that bumped and ground across the parched plains of ancient Kansas. The hoofs of the four-horse team thudded dispiritedly. The desiccated vehicle groaned a wretched protest in every joint and rivet. Over the perpetual jangle of harness, the driver from his box above shouted a periodic "Hoo-up!" and sharply cracked his whip.

The carriage was warded with bags, boxes and bales—piled on the roof and lashed on behind. Dust covered everything.

Kor huddled inside, crowded among a half dozen other passengers who sat facing each other on hard board seats that ran athwart the carriage. Two of the passengers were Triszmén, accompanied by a woman. The other three were Outlanders, dressed in dull, brownish garb. The Triszmén wore the saffron cloaks of their station. Their garments were of fine texture, now sadly the worse for grime and wear.

Kor studied them thoughtfully, so far as he could without appearing curious. Both were men in their early thirties, the woman a few years younger, perhaps. The woman sat between them, looking at neither, seeming to interest herself in the never-changing wastescape visible through the narrow carriage windows.

Wind from an inferno spat through the openings, hurled stinging particles of sand with its furious breath. The heat was terrific. The male Triszmén had wrapped their heads in their yellow cloaks and sat hunched over, the tips of rapier-scabbards brushing the floor between buskined heels. The woman sat quietly erect, swaying easily with the violent lurching of the coach.

No one talked. It was obvious to Kor that these Triszmén, who had got on at the last overnight stop, had other things on their mind than conversation. Two of the Outlanders shared the board seat with Kor, the other crouched on the weaving floor, clutching a dirty bundle of what appeared to be old rags.

His position was almost intolerable to Kor. He was not used to enduring such common physical hardship as this. Ordinarily, he could easily have made proper com-

pensation for the heat and roughness of traveling—a minor adjustment of his mind would have taken care of it nicely—except that he dared not appear as a picture of cool comfort before his miserable companions. They rode unashamed of their sweat, grime, and aching muscles. To avoid seeming other than human, Kor had to sweat it out with them. He did so, grimly.

"Perhaps," Kor finally suggested aloud, "we could make this trip more enjoyable. Has anybody got any ideas?"

The Outlanders eyed each other with embarrassment. The Trizmen remained wrapped in their cloaks. The woman scowled out the open window.

"We might sing a few songs," Kor murmured hopefully.

The Outlander on the floor moved cramped legs, rolled over on his bundle of dirty rags.

"I ain't much of a hand to sing, Reverend, but maybe some of these others . . ."

The Outlander at Kor's left grinned.

"I can't sing without my bottle of synth, and the way these land travel companies charge for baggage, I couldn't afford to bring it along!"

The other Outlander main-

tained a somber silence, dwelling upon something remote within his own being.

Kor lifted his gaze to the young woman across from him.

"Perhaps the young lady could suggest something."

One of the Trizmen unwrapped a fold of cloak from his face. One eye peered out, balefully.

"She don't sing, Reverend."

The girl opened her mouth as if to speak, appeared to think better of it, and shot a beseeching glance at Kor. He would have given a great deal to look into her mind just then, but indiscriminate mind-tapping was prohibited by the Brotherhood. It was impossible to do it without being detected.

The sun stood high as the carriage finally pulled off the road among a clump of cottonwoods. The road twisted and turned among low hills, following a small stream that wound among scrubby trees before losing itself farther on in the desert sands. At this particular point, the stream had been widened and deepened to make a watering place.

The carriage door swung open and the driver barked at them.

"Hour stop. Lunch. Water the horses. All out!"

It was good to stretch one's legs in the open. Kor walked briskly up and down, performing the ritual Exercises of the Men. The horses, loosed from their traces, stamped, neighed and plodded into the stream to stand, drinking.

The Outlanders had retired in a small group to the shade of a cottonwood. The bundle of rags held by one turned out to be a lunch for all three. The Triszmen and their woman companion had disappeared.

Kor walked around the carriage curiously, but there was no one on the other side. It was quiet in the oasis, except for the far splashing of the horses in the stream and the quiet drone of a horde of flies that had settled on some horse droppings.

Kor was about to round the rear of the coach and join the coachman with his horses, when the sound of rapid footsteps drew him back. He turned. The young woman hurried toward him from the far side of the road.

"Reverend! Reverend Sir!"

The expression on her face bespoke trouble. She was breathing heavily.

"You must stop them!" she gasped. "They are fighting!"

"Who are fighting, lady?"

"My husband and my brother. You must stop them!"

She started back, gesturing quickly. Kor paused, alert. He dared use his mind here. He palped the unseen extent of the oasis. A hundred yards away, in a small draw, he sensed two men crouching motionless. Fighting? thought Kor.

"Peace!" he commanded quietly. "It is not proper for a man of the cloth to intervene in family affairs. Why are they fighting?"

The woman came back slowly. She wrung her hands. Tears stood in her eyes.

"Please. They will kill each other!"

"Why are they fighting?"

She began to sob. "I left my husband and returned to my family, but my husband came to get me. My family would not give me up, only consenting upon my husband's promise to be a good husband to me in the future. My brother accompanies us back to the city to be sure that conditions are now as my husband promises. They got into another argument. But please hurry, Sir—before one should hurt the other!"

Her story, outside its vagueness, was full of flaws, Kor thought. If she were an

Outlander, then her brother was an Outlander also. Why, therefore, did he wear the clothing of a Triszman? What sort of a blundering trap was this? He decided to see.

"Very well. I will go with you."

The Triszmen still crouched motionless, but as Kor and the woman approached, he heard the sudden ring of steel on steel. One shouted an oath.

The two were going heavily at it in the draw, slashing and thrusting with their weapons as Kor and the woman quickly approached. Kor could have taught them a few things about handling their steel, and he almost smiled at the thought that either of these could harm the other with their faked thrusts and phony feints.

"Hurry! Hurry!" The woman cried, distraught.

"You can see that I am unarmed," Kor pointed out, keeping a wary eye on the fencers. Their footwork was execrable, he noted, and their stance utterly impossible.

"Speak to them, Sir!"

"Very well, if that will do."

He strode toward the slashing pair.

"Ho—you two!"

Neither combatant paid him the slightest attention.

The air was thick between them with the glint of flashing blades, curdled around them with the sulphurous utterance of oaths.

"Stop your fighting!" Kor shouted. "I command you to be at peace!"

Both Triszmen whirled at once, teeth showing in grins of savage pleasure. One ran at him, blade leveled.

"Kill the Scarlet Saint!"

How stupid of them, Kor thought, to believe they could kill him. He had already mentally detected the blaster in the other Triszman's belt. As the fellow drew his weapon, depending on the swordsman to keep Kor distracted, Kor nullified its charge with a simple shift of electrons. He sidestepped the lunge of the advancing swordsman, seized that worthy by the arm, whirled, and flung him at his fellow conspirator.

The two sprawled on the sandy ground, rolled over, leaped up and started running. The woman was already running away, clawing her way up the steep side of the draw. In a moment, all three were out of sight, and soon the sound of their hasty departure died away.

"A very clumsy maneuver," Kor pondered. "I wonder why? Did they actually think

they might kill me? Of course, they must have . . . there was that fellow with the blaster. I wonder where they got to?"

It took only a moment to locate the trio. Three horses had been tethered in the next ravine, and the conspirators were already mounted and riding like mad to reach the highway farther down.

Kor smiled faintly, tossed the unretrieved rapiers behind a boulder, and returned to the coach to while away the remainder of the noon hour. He had not provided himself with lunch since food was not a necessity when he chose to do without it.

The missing Triszmén caused a little delay while the driver swore, apologized, fumed, and sent the Outlanders to look for them. The Outlanders came back empty-handed.

"If they like it here," growled the driver, "they can just stay—if they haven't been picked up by a band of Roamers. This country is full of 'em!"

The thought of Roamers—outlaw wanderers of the wastelands—spurred the driver to furious action. He got the remainder of his passengers aboard as quickly as possible, leaped to his box and whipped the horses into

a plunging gallop down the road, and did not slow down until open country surrounded them once more.

Most of Rih was burning desert in these latter days, and this part of the world was no exception. It might even, Kor thought, looking at it from the lurching coach, be a little worse than the rest.

Kor was more than pleased that the Trisz had already moved against him, scornful though he was of their method of attack. He kept alert, but no further incident occurred to unsettle his tranquillity.

For days the coach staggered and ground along the dusty way, changing horses at convenient stops, discharging and taking on passengers. Kor kept a watchful eye upon every new traveler but all acted with disarming innocence. Mostly, they were the natural inhabitants of these desert plains. Some were obviously journeying from distant parts, but no more came dressed as Triszmén.

Nights were passed at cheerless inns along the forbidding route. These inns were maintained by the land travelers' associations that ran the coach lines, and were supported by the outrageous toll exacted from passing wayfarers.

It neared sunset, a day's travel from the city of the Trisz. The coach shuddered to a creaking stop in an inn courtyard. Stiff, weary passengers climbed down. How he might have saved himself all this, Kor sighed. A simple "twist" of his mind, and he could have journeyed almost instantaneously to Ka-si. Were not the precautions imposed by the Brotherhood a little extravagant?

The stuffy air of the inn reeked of stale food, spilled synthetics, sweat and grime. For appearances sake, Kor ate a meager supper of stewed meat and a buttery synthetic, then retired to his room.

As usual, he slept on the floor. After nineteen years of sleeping on the stone floor of his Institute chamber, he could not be conditioned, even by a coach ride, to try sleeping in a soft bed. Moreover, he distrusted the appearance of the sagging iron frame and patched bedclothes. They looked inhabited.

Kor awoke in the still dark of the night. In the stable behind the inn, a horse stamped restlessly. The inn creaked and crackled as its board frame radiated day-stored heat into the chill desert night. Creeping things rustled under the flooring and in the

walls. A mouse gnawed persistently somewhere.

Kor's extra-sensory perception functioned, dispelling the dark. He sensed a Person—a man of the People—leaning above the bed, feeling cautiously over the quilts with his left hand. His right held a long, sharp knife.

Kor studied him briefly, enabled to visualize the scene in his mind. He had not seen this fellow before in his travels, but had noticed him last night at the bar of the inn, swilling synthetic alcohol.

The Person was small, poorly dressed. He looked hungry. Just now, he had thin lips drawn back from wolfish looking teeth as he pawed for the body he expected to find lying there.

Kor raised himself on his elbow.

"Are you looking for some one, friend?"

The Triszman—obviously such, in spite of his poor dress—whirled with an expression of fear and consternation. He peered blindly into the dark; his small, rodent-like head jerked to right and left. He held the knife uplifted as if to ward off attack.

"You seem disturbed that I am not asleep in my bed," Kor observed. "May I ask to what I owe the honor of this visit?"

The Person made gulping, strangled sounds and began to edge toward the window.

"You cannot move" Kor told him. "Please answer my question."

The intruder stiffened. His face lost all expression.

"I came here to kill you," he said in a flat, emotionless tone.

"Why?"

"I am a Stabber—I kill for hire."

"You mean you have no personal reason to dislike me?"

"No."

"Yet you would kill me?"

"Yes."

"Again, why?"

"For the money. He offered to pay me well."

Kor nodded in the dark and pushed easily into the Person's mind. It was something he had to do, to avoid killing the fellow. And he would have to cover his action afterward. His lip curled in disgust in many of the things he found there; others stirred him with pity. He sorted through the memories, for the most part obscured by what obviously was synth-addiction. Finally he extracted the image he sought . . . it had the proper associations. He perceived the saintly looking face of a fleshy

man of middle age, surrounded by a bluish halo.

"Is this the man who hired you?"

"Yes."

"What is this sensation of blueness I feel about him?"

"He is a Wearer of the Blue."

Kor lifted his eyebrows.

"His name?"

"I do not know."

"What is his Chapel?"

"I don't know that, either."

"Very well." Kor carefully memorized the remembered features of the Blue Brother. He would be on the lookout for that one. He studied the wretched Person narrowly.

"Who knows you are in my room?"

"Nobody knows. I have taken a room here since three days ago. I have been waiting for you to come."

"You know, don't you, that it is a serious sin to attempt the life of a Scarlet Saint?"

"I know it is."

Kor thought carefully. He could easily destroy this fellow, but what would he gain by it? He must move with care to avoid showing his own hand. Naturally, the Person's mission must fail, but how to make that failure appear natural? The problem puzzled Kor for the space of several seconds. The tenor of the fel-

low's answer provided a clue to Kor's action.

"You are poorly dressed . . . in need of money."

"Yes."

"You have received religious instruction at a chapel?"

"Yes."

Kor smiled. "Then you know that the Lord Sun forgives the sins of the people." The would-be assassin repeated the phrases as Kor uttered them. "There is salvation for the wicked as well as the righteous. None is turned away, and he repenteth in his heart . . . The Lord Sun cleanses . . . he heals . . . he makes pure . . . he showeth himself to whomsoever seeketh."

The assassin fell on the floor and moaned, hands over his face.

"Arise," Kor said kindly. "The Lord Sun forgives. You are saved. In token of your salvation . . . do you know how to make the Sign of the Conqueror?"

The prostrate person whimpered. "Yes."

"Arise and make it. In token of your salvation, your clasped and lifted hands will glow with the Sun's glory!"

The fellow got to his feet, lifted clasped hands in the Sign. A faint glow quickly

brightened and grew into a blaze of supernal light that flooded the room with a naked glare. A look of transcendent ecstasy turned the ratlike little features of the man into a picture of weird beauty.

"Go in peace," Kor told him gently. "Tell all whom you meet of the glory you have witnessed in the Lord Sun."

That was enough, Kor decided. He had broken a minor rule of the Brotherhood, but he had not broken his oath. Proselytizing by mental impression was a forbidden practice, but it was a lesser evil than murdering the unfortunate fellow.

Kor hoped the incident would distress the Trisz, at the same time that it would appear alienly normal to them. Not professing to understand human religion, the Trisz suffered it to exist, tolerating it as a simple-minded, though curious, indigenous custom—a useful instrument for holding the People in check.

CHAPTER V

THE Trisz city of Ka-si was built on the bluffs above the ancient, bone-dry bed of the river Miz-zou. The desert swept in from the western plains, a sea of sand that

lapped at the spired mound of the city and flowed eastward almost to Set-loo, where the Mia-pi still trickled southward in a scanty flow to the shrunken sea.

Accustomed as he was to the irrigated greenness of the Institute surroundings in the mountains, Kor still found strange beauty in the wind-swept wastes that pressed in upon the city. Overhead, the cloudless bowl of indigo minimized the half-mile-high reach of city spires, sun-gleaming in brilliant contrast against the sky.

Once, Kor knew, the sky had been not indigo, but as blue as the robes of the Brothers. Water vapor had clustered then in cottony gobbets high in the upper air, and the sun had shone bright yellow upon a land that was everywhere lush and verdant.

It still rained upon Rth, but not often in most places, and in many places never. The Sun was swollen and old, and the waters of the planet were dissipated. Rth struggled in her last days. Soon, she would be dead, and her People with her, and her Men, and every last living thing under the Sun. Because of the Trisz.

History implied that Rth was still green when the Trisz first came. Her oceans had

been filled with cubic miles of precious water. But slowly over thousands of years the Trisz had deliberately sapped the planet. Nobody knew exactly why or how, but the best observations of the Men had long ago led them to believe that the Trisz converted Rth's water into energy and transmitted that energy to the parent-body, somewhere in the lost reaches of cosmic space.

Some day, having squeezed the planet dry, the Trisz would load up their ships with their goods and their slaves, would destroy their cities and return to the void whence they came, or to other worlds still under their sway. When that happened, taught the Men, the last People would be left alone on Rth, to gasp out their sorry lives with their dying planet and nearly dead Sun.

It was a grim picture, a picture etched into Kor's mind by repeated lectures at the Institute. Further, the student Men had been conducted by the Masters to planets already deserted by the Trisz. There, they had viewed the withered bones of ancient worlds that had given up their life-blood and their lives to the remorseless siphoning of the Trisz. What

had happened to the lost inhabitants of these worlds? Not even their bones remained on the wind-scoured plains in token of the living beings that once had swarmed there.

Perhaps it was already too late to save Rth . . . but the People might yet be saved, if the Trisz could be destroyed. There were still young, green worlds in the galaxy, fresh worlds untouched by the Trisz, or where the aliens had just begun operations, worlds which had not yet felt the full stamp of their greed. If the Trisz could be destroyed, their ships would remain to ferry Rth's People to far stars and more hospitable planets.

Kor walked slowly through the city streets. The lower levels of Ka-si swarmed like a hill of desert ants. The city was the dwelling-place of Triszmen—the bondsmen of the invaders. Outlanders might visit, but not settle permanently, in the city, unless taken into the service of the Trisz.

Every comfort was built into the lavish apartments, every convenience in the colorful shops and amusement resorts. The People who worked for and with the Trisz were the favored of Rth. They had everything. They wore

elegantly styled, flamboyant costumes of fine materials under their yellow robes. Their living quarters had plumbing, automatic food preparers, artificial lighting, refrigeration, television, air-conditioning—all the comforts of a civilized race.

The People of Ka-si looked happy — feverishly happy. They were so madly happy that they rushed from one joy to another, lifting their spirits with the bright colors woven into their garments, with the sparkling vitalization of their synthetic drinks, with their rounds of sex and exuberant debauchery.

Sparkling signs lit up the canyoned streets with an interfluctuation of garish color. Huge televisor screens glared with outdoor public entertainment, news, tidbits of fancy to catch the attention and absorb the interest. Ka-si was like a human city might be, if it had not been populated also by the Trisz. Humanity lived only on the lower levels. The work of the Triszmen was conducted on levels higher up, while above those, only the Trisz knew what took place. Up there, far above the gay, bright lights, the Trisz reigned alone, unapproachable, inexorable, invisible, but

potently — and hideously — present.

Kor had no hope of obtaining audience with the Trisz this evening, but he took himself to the Administration Center in search of possible information. A uniformed guard gave him the news he was looking for.

"Sorry, Sir. Audience with the Trisz takes place at half of the morning. You will have to come back then."

Though a Triszman, the guard had respect for the scarlet of Kor's office.

"Is there lodging to be had nearby, soldier?"

Kor drifted away with brief directions in mind. He joined the throng of people crowding the walk. Shortly, he noticed that a clear space was left around him as he walked, the crowd automatically parting to permit him untrammelled passage. The Scarlet Saints were respected both by the People and the Triszmen . . . even feared in a superstitious way. Occasionally, a passer-by approached closer than his fellows, knelt quickly and touched the hem of Kor's robe with reverent fingers.

Kor spoke a blessing on each occasion, but his mind was not on his surroundings. He had begun to extrapolate,

seeking to find a clear course for his future actions. Up to now, he had not had enough factors, and even yet, many necessary ones were lacking. He could make nothing clear of the future—merely a muddled impression of encroaching menace. No amount of juggling the factors in third-order rationalization could bring this disturbing impression into the sharp focus of a probable future event.

The lodging to which the guard had directed him was a spire that thrust a half-mile into the early evening sky. It must, Kor thought, pierce a half-mile as well into the rocky bed underlying the plain.

The entrance was gay with glittering glass and colorful plastic, a dazzling display of ever-changing hues that invited and repelled him at once. A stream of people went in and out through revolving doors which emitted puffs of cool breath from the air-conditioned interior. As Kor tarried, trying to make up his mind to enter, the feeling of menace which haunted him strengthened perceptibly.

Kor stood aside from the flow of human traffic, his mind locked in third-order rationalization of the situa-

tion. A type of logic that was not logic, Kor's method of reasoning based its processes on dissimilarities rather than similarities, proceeded swiftly onward to conclusions completely divorced from the premises. The conscious mind being incapable of this dissimilar analysis, the function was carried on by the super-consciousness, called the "primary mind" in the vocabulary of the Men.

The Scarlet Saints received intensive training in the development and use of this rational function, present in all human beings but submerged by the conscious attributes of the individual and generally referred to as "instinct" or "intuition." It was the Saints' recognition, isolation, and refinement of this function as an illogical method of rational apprehension that made possible their complete control of mind and environment and produced that superbly-knit thinking machine called a Man.

His reasoning told Kor that his life would be in immediate danger if he entered this building. Obviously, then, the guard who had directed him to this place had been under orders to do so. But Kor's mind brought him another restless conviction. If

he did not enter the building, he was in even more positive danger. Wherein lay the difference between the two evils? His mind rationalized the additional factors and came up with the conclusion that his best action was to remain where he was. Another factor was about to enter the picture, and he could best cope with the situation if he remained to see what might be its nature.

So Kor waited, apparently amusing himself by watching the crowds go by. There was music on the air from radionic speakers spaced along the street. Across the street, a gigantic television screen flickered in full color its messages of entertainment, news, or whatever was being broadcast at the moment, synchronized with the noise made by the speakers.

As Kor relaxed, his mental distress became soothed. He merely felt a sense of expectant unease at being among an unfamiliar crowd.

It seemed to him that he could almost feel the eyes of the Trisz upon him, if it could be said that the Trisz possessed eyes. But, then, they did, of course—this horde of People represented the eyes of the Trisz, and the ears and hands as well; for the Triszmen in

their blind ignorance and love of comfort served their masters well.

Kor wished that he might expand his mind into this crowd, but he dared not. He could not resort at all to his expanded super-powers anywhere in the city, even in the face of death, for it was not his own safety alone that was at stake, but the safety of the Brotherhood as well, and the destiny of the entire human race of People.

A swirl of blue detached itself from the hurrying, colorful crowd and approached Kor. A Blue Brother, Kor observed with an attempt at relief that did not quite jell. The man's visage was hawk-like, deep-hued from desert sun, and saturnine. Kor automatically entered his coming as a factor in his dissimilarization of the situation. The result was not good.

"Sir!" The Blue Brother dipped his head before Kor in the salute to rank.

Kor returned the greeting with a similar nod.

"Blessing, Brother!"

"Blessing, Sir. It is unusual to meet one of our Scarlet Saints in Ka-si. Where is your See?"

"I am unassigned," Kor replied stiffly, introducing him-

self. "I came to receive assignment from the Triax, but I am told that reception is at half of the morning. It is now the first of the evening, and I was considering where I might spend the night."

The Blue Brother's expression was keen-eyed, crafty. His manner developed a grudging warmth.

"You must be he who will occupy the See of No-ka-si, which was recently vacated. I am Pol Seran, Blue Brother of the second district Chapel in No-ka-si. However, since it is not customary for a Saint to enter his See before assignment, the hospitality of my own Chapel is open to you, if you will spend the night with me. You surely are not registered here?" He gestured toward the gaudy entrance.

"Not yet, Brother, but I had wished to be close for my audience."

The Blue Brother shrugged and made a face.

"A public girlhouse, Sir! Come—it is but a short distance to my Chapel. Do you have baggage?"

Kor's bags were still at the carriage depot, at the edge of the city, a long walk from this central spot.

"Easily picked up tomorrow," said Brother Pol. "I myself will bring you back in

the morning in time for the Trisz reception. Come, Sir. The evening is getting along, and the street at night is no place for our Saints."

Was there a tinge of mockery to the utterance of the Blue Brother's final words? Kor would have liked to ask a few leading questions, but the sense of unease which gripped him warned silence.

Momentarily Kor extrapolated the sum of his experiences, and decided that he would be safer in the sanctuary offered than anywhere else. It was not surprising to him that the Blue Brother fitted well with the situation. The Blue Brothers were trained in the essence of service to the Trisz and the orders of their religion. It had to be that way. Only the Men themselves could be permitted to know fully what was going on.

For an instant, Tor Shan's parting words hung tantalizingly in Kor's mind—"... find out just how dangerous you can be to the Trisz—and still live!"

Kor had noticed the small surface cars plying the street, but had not realized they were public transportation until the Blue Brother hailed one and they got in. The seat was soft, luxuriously upholstered

—uncomfortable to Kor, who was used to sterner ways of travel.

The car was a product of Trisz technology, a manifestation of the simulated benevolence of the Trisz to their servants. Only the people of the Trisz cities had use of them, as well as of the air cars which flew from city to city. Such technological luxuries were on a par with home comforts, television, entertainment, the whorehouses, the synthetic liquors served in well-kept bars — for these were the temporal rewards the Trisz paid their faithful servants for their devotion and loyalty.

On the surface, it seemed that the Trisz were friends of mankind, returning a means of luxurious living, a life of pleasure and joy for a few hours out of each individual's day. Only the Saints were fully aware that mankind's service to the Trisz was bringing about its own slow death, that the aliens from outer space were killing the People with a satanic brand of kindness.

Kor was careful to attempt no prying conversation as they rode northward to Noka-si. He knew enough to beware the Trisz bearing gifts;

the car was a nest of spy devices.

He did not doubt at all that the Trisz had sent the Blue Brother after him. They wanted him under control until a means could be devised to draw his fangs, whatever the Trisz might suspect they were. Kor's extrapolation for a full day ahead brought him nothing but a feeling of unrest. Therefore, he could assume that his actions had been channelled into an acceptable line of conduct. What lay outside this line? Left to himself, what might he have done that would have pointed up his dangerous attitude toward the Trisz and ensured his own immediate peril? Somehow, Kor was sure that not even the Trisz themselves knew.

The Scarlet Saint was eagerly interested in No-ka-si. If the Blue Brother's surmise were correct, and Kor should be assigned to this diocese, then his surroundings had an added significance for him. Much as Kor had learned of the social aspects of the People, it had been all from lectures and books. For the first time he was seeing an aggregation of People that covered more territory than the meager confines of a village.

The human city of No-ka-si

was located to the north of the main city, separated from it by a narrow arid belt marking the ancient course of the Miz-zon. Nowhere in the surrounding waste was a tree or a blade of grass. The macadamized highway was laid on a bed of sterile sand, and ended on the paved streets of the smaller town.

Here there were no blazing electric lights. The streets were dimly lit by an occasional lamp-post that contained an oil-burning light. Windows were yellow rectangles of oil-lamp or candle illumination.

The streets were paved with a rough-surfaced plastic. The low, domed houses were built of a plastic similar to that in the buildings of the city. Everywhere, even in small courtyards and entries, the ground was completely plastic-paved in order to hold down as much as possible the ever-present dust. There were few enough trees left on Rth, and no lumber at all for purposes of construction, even precious few metals; hence the prevailing use of plastic for building, hard, strong, colorful, made from the ubiquitous sand.

Deep artesian wells furnished both cities with water—precious water that was husbanded and re-used as often

as it could be passed through the purifying tanks.

This careful conservation of water made the natural production of vegetable food impossible except in outlying areas where only rare rainfall made a species of farming possible, or where association of the land with a surface stream permitted irrigation. Mostly, however, the People ate synthetic foods, many of which were imported from distant worlds in the far-flung commercial system of the Trisz, with the addition of a few vegetables grown in the hydroponic gardens of the Trisz cities.

People were not numerous in the streets of No-ka-si, but Kor noticed that some were Triszmen; and there was a solid proportion wearing the simple garments that proclaimed them Outlanders. The Triszmen living here, lived with their Outlander families who were not permitted dwelling room in the Trisz city. Becoming a Triszman was a matter of application and careful selection, so that in most families of No-ka-si only the bread earner was in the service of the masters. The town was under the rulership of the regional Lord, since the Trisz were not di-

rectly concerned with its administration. The local Lord, however, was held responsible for keeping the peace and administering civic affairs throughout his own region and had to conform in all ways to the overlordship of the Trisz.

Kor learned these things from the talk of his blue-robed companion as they rode into the town. Getting out when the vehicle stopped by the dark bulk of a building, Brother Pol gestured back the way they had come. The lighted spires of Ka-si reared like beacons into the night sky, and as Kor looked at them, a trillion tiny sparkles of iridescent light began to wink and cluster into a semi-opaque curtain before the view.

"A beautiful effect!" Kor remarked. "What causes it?"

"Sandstorm," Brother Pol replied. "The city is protected by anti-sand projectors. They send up a curtain of radiation around the entire city. As the sand is blown into it, it is disrupted, and none can get through. When the wind blows extremely hard, it is often a most compelling sight."

Kor had noticed that a chill wind was rising, and now he began to feel the sting of flying grit. It was obvious that

the human city had no such protection.

Brother Pol conducted Kor to the low dome dwelling beside the larger Chapel, which was cubical, plain-surfaced in the style of Chapels everywhere. A gilded simulacrum of the Sun guarded the entrance to the Priest's quarters, and broad, shallow steps led down at once from the entrance toward the sunken center of the dwelling: the living room, from which other rooms, at higher levels approached by stairs, gave off.

The cold of night had not yet penetrated into the Brother's house, but it was not uncomfortably warm, even though no air-conditioning was permitted here. A sweet smell of incense picked at Kor's nostrils. From somewhere, he heard the soft playing of a stringed instrument. In a moment, he spied the musician: a handsome, half-naked girl of the People, dark-haired and well-shaped, squatting on a mat across the room. She plucked fitfully at the strings of her instrument as they came in.

Her presence made Kor feel ill at ease, though he knew it was customary and accepted for the Brothers to take girls, as well as other serving people, into their service. Their

ability to do so, naturally, depended upon the financial solvency of their administrative position; and it was only to be expected that the priest, this close to a populous Trisz city, would be fully solvent. Brother Pol was obviously as successful as any Blue Brother could ever hope to be.

The Brother spoke to the girl.

"That will do, Seta." He turned and whispered to Kor, "In deference to you, Sir, I will send her home tonight." He spoke kindly to the girl. "You may return to your people tonight, Seta. Please stop by the kitchen on your way out and instruct the cook to prepare dinner for myself and His Eminence, Sir Kor. And do hurry on your way; a sand-storm is springing up and it may get nasty out."

The girl rose lithely and dropped her instrument on the mat. Her complexion was clear, her features regular and only a shade less than beautiful. She radiated a happy gratitude. Her single garment covered her slightly in the middle . . . but only slightly. Kor looked away with a feeling of embarrassment.

The girl did not leave at once, but came toward Kor, dropped to one knee and

touched the hem of his scarlet robe, raised it to her bare breasts, then to her lips.

"Your blessing, Sir!"

"Blessing, in the name of the Lord Sun, daughter," Kor murmured mechanically, gazing over her head.

The girl backed slowly from the room. Brother Pol smiled with saturnine amusement.

"Splendid creature, isn't she? But of little interest to a newly graduated Saint such as yourself, Sir Kor?"

"Of no interest whatever," Kor replied distantly, then mentally kicked himself for having answered at all.

Brother Pol shrugged still smiling.

"It takes only a little time away from the Institute, and one's values change. The world is new and strange to you now, Sir, but it will grow on you. Girls are pleasant people. You will doubtless find that out for yourself!"

CHAPTER VI

THE audience hall of the Trisz was a large chamber, high up in the Administration Center, above the common levels of human occupation. The elevator had shot upward like a bullet for many seconds before slowing to a stop. Clusters of People

stood about the polished floor. Some were Outlanders and others wore colorful garb reserved for the Triszmen. Uniformed guards passed among them, alert to keep order. It was not quite the hour of half-morning.

Kor said, "Must all these People take their turn in audience before the Trisz?"

The Blue Brother made an expansive gesture around the perimeter of the audience chamber. Rich draperies shot scintillant reflections as they stirred gently in the air-conditioned breeze.

"Many more than these could be accommodated simultaneously. When the word is given, all go behind these drapes and are interviewed by the Trisz in smaller chambers. It gives the individual privacy."

"Each has audience before a separate Trisz, then?"

The Blue Brother shrugged and smiled. "Or the same Trisz. Is there any difference, as far as the Trisz are concerned? They seem to have that peculiar faculty which we generally ascribe only to the Lord Sun — omnipresence."

Such a statement did not become a Blue Brother, but Kor refrained from comment. Brother Pol had been trained

to believe in the twin concepts of the Lord Sun and the benevolence of the Trisz. Only Kor himself in all this crowd understood how much of that faith was truth and how much was hokum to impress the People and confuse the Trisz.

He said, "Which chamber ought I choose, Brother Pol?"

"It doesn't matter. Take the nearest. Everybody else will do the same."

"Are they all here for assignment somewhere, these People?"

"It does not always follow Sir Kor, that audience with the Trisz means assignment. The Trisz are a gentle and benevolent race. They hear and act upon complaints of the People, in addition to doing business with them."

Kor recalled his lessons on the subject, but the course had been scanty.

"What kind of problems, Brother?"

"No problem is too small to deserve the attention and best effort of the Trisz," Brother Pol replied sanctimoniously. "A person may desire the love or companionship of one of the opposite sex. Or perhaps he is ambitious, and wants a position in the court of a Lord, or in a business establishment, or in the service of

the Trisz. Whatever it is, the Trisz, when properly petitioned, bend every effort to solve that problem to the individual's satisfaction. Our prayers to the Lord Sun, Sir Kor, are answered by the Trisz!"

Kor pondered the other's statements.

"Do you mean to say that if a man wants a certain woman, the Trisz would forcibly procure her for him?"

"Forceibly? Oh, no, Sir! She would be procured—but not forcibly. Anyway, what right would she have to refuse, if it is the will of the Trisz? Besides, the Trisz make it pleasant for her."

Advanced hypnosis, of course Kor remembered. Where a problem could not be, or was not, solved to the petitioner's satisfaction, the same method of hypnosis made it seem to him that it had been. The text books had been specific on this point.

The benevolent Trisz. Bah!

Brother Pol touched Kor's arm.

"It's just about time, Sir. Let me remind you: when you speak to the Trisz, remember to use the customary language gestures. These are not only a sign of respect, as you have been taught, but also for re-

cording by machines. The Trisz keep records for future generations, when your recorded voice may be unintelligible in the light of the language then to be spoken. The sign language will remain the same forever. As for the Trisz themselves, they need neither your voice nor the signs, as they read your discourse from your mind."

Liar, thought Kor. That he reconsidered. After all, Brother Pol knew no better. Every body thought the Trisz could read minds, but the Saints knew they could not. The respectful "gestures for the recorders" which law and custom commanded to be used in speaking to the Trisz were a complex sign language which rapidly and coherently carried the speaker's meaning to the aliens. Kor knew he could think anything he pleased in the presence of the Trisz, so long as his expression or attitude did not betray him.

A gong sounded a silvery, melodious note. A soft voice, borne on amplifiers, rustled across the tremendous audience chamber.

"Audience call . . . audience call. Approach the Trisz with humility, reverence, and sobriety. Gesture your prayers, and they will be answered. Audience call. Enter now into

the presence of the mighty Trisz!"

An excited stir passed through the crowd. Feet scraped on the gleaming floor. Garments swirled with color. The air vibrated with last-moment, whispered comments. Kor stepped to the nearest drape and drew it back.

The room on the other side was small, not more than double a man's length on each side. Directly across from the entrance, the wall receded into a shallow bay or niche. The walls were bare. The floor was of the same gleaming plastic as in the audience hall.

Kor extrapolated briefly. The act gave him a sullen, defiant feeling. He could detect nothing immediate save the usual restless unease, a feeling of menace. All the factors were still not present, he thought.

A column of pale, lovely fire stood suddenly in the niche . . . the Trisz. Kor realized he was not actually seeing the Trisz, which was an invisible manifestation of strange energy. Its presence was detectable only by its effect upon the air within the niche, and this effect was heightened by hidden projectors which sprayed the disturbed air molecules with changing hues

of light. It was effective, Kor admitted, even as good as some of the stunts the Saints occasionally conjured in the Chapels to impress the People with the wonder-working qualities of the Lord Sun.

He knelt on one knee and watched the Trisz fade through lavender, into pale green, retire into yellow, and emerge into glowing crimson.

Thin, tinny, and strident, the thought-impression that was the "voice" of the Trisz was impressed upon Kor's conscious mind.

"Hail, Man! The Trisz welcome you to Ka-si."

Kor made proper gestures of salutation, accompanying the signs with words intended for the audio-recorders . . . and for the ears of listening Triszmen, he had no doubt.

"Greetings in the name of the Lord Sun. O mighty Trisz!"

The Trisz turned a tender pink.

"I have looked into your mind, O Man. I perceive that you are Kor Danay, graduate Man of the Institute of Denver."

Liar, Kor thought. His registration papers had been sent ahead of him.

"True, O mighty Trisz," he replied.

"The Trisz hold the Men in high esteem. They are ever in dear remembrance. The Trisz are the protector of the People—the Men are the weapon in the Trisz right hand."

"True, O mighty Trisz," Kor humbly acquiesced.

What a farce, he thought to himself. Let's get the stupid formalities over with and find out what comes next. Go ahead, read my mind! You could detect my expanded superconsciousness, but my conscious mind is a closed book to you, you puff of wind in a colored light!

The Trisz continued. "We are pleased with the thoughts of respect and devotion that flow from your mind, O Man. Your journey has been a long one, and difficult. You desire rest and tranquillity. The intensity of your thought amounts to prayer, which the Trisz take pleasure in fulfilling. But first, tell us of your journey."

Kor thought, you want me to deny what happened, don't you? Then you'll claim to read the incidents from my mind and arrest me for attempting to restrain the truth. Well, I'll tell you what happened.

He cast his glance piously upward, as if to view the Lord Sun gleaming above the softly glowing spindle of the Trisz.

"I owe my presence here only to the Lord Sun, my Protector, so eventful was my journey!"

"Most interesting," squeaked the Trisz. "I read the details of your adventures in your thoughts, but please gesture the occurrence for the visual recorders."

Kor gestured his story with pious overtones. The Trisz was uninterested in the first episode, where Kor related that he had been attacked by "robbers" disguised in the garb of loyal servants of the Trisz; but its interest revived with Kor's relating of the incident at the inn—described from the Scarlet Saint's point of view.

Suspicion, prime virtue of the conqueror, held the Trisz in thrall. It put questions apparently designed to lead Kor into some kind of semantic trap, but he evaded with a liberal use of pious platitudes.

It said, "Does this Lord Sun of yours often appear like this to the People?"

Kor adroitly refused to be committed, entering instead upon a long disquisition on religious visions, acknowledging their kinship to mental projection, and harmoniously organizing them with the concept of God as manifested in the symbol of the Lord Sun.

He quoted authorities, described circumstances. The Trisz bade him stop.

"This has been very interesting for the records," it said. "Of course, we know of no such universal Lord Sun as you describe. We accept the realistic view that your opinions are evidence of a faulty mind-structure which you cannot help, and we therefore admit your right to worship such a god." There was a moment of thoughtful pause, then the Trisz went on, "Your registration has been received and approved, Man, for assignment to the diocese of No-ka-si. I discern from your thoughts that you passed last night in the quarters of a Blue Brother Pol who awaits you now in the central audience chamber. The floor guard has been instructed to deliver to him your orders of assignment. He will conduct you to your new post in the Scarlet Chapel of the No-ka-si region and perform the proper introductions. You will deliver yourself now into his guidance. Good luck attend you, Man."

"Blessing of the Lord Sun, O mighty Trisz!"

Kor rose and went backward out of the chamber.

(To be continued)

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By

THEODORE MATHIESON

Being a school teacher, Mr. Geer came into contact with a great many charming young girls—always a temptation to an unattached male. But always he had been able to resist the normal masculine urges that could have ruined his career—until, that is, he met the incredibly lovely Jane Doe and learned that an ordinary name can hide a lot of extraordinary virtues . . . and vices!

BY THE fifth week of school Mr. Geer had formed the unshakeable suspicion that he had an alien form of life in his senior English class. It took him that long to suspect, although he had given her special attention on the very first day.

"Jane Doe," he said, calling the roll for the first time, and then looked up with a frown. She was a ravishing creature in the back row, with vivid black hair and eyebrows and an almost luminously pale skin. Mr. Geer stood looking at her for several seconds, trying to decide what color her eyes were, and then

with a sudden flush went on calling names.

But after he had given the first assignment he went to the window and stood watching her out of the corner of his eye. "Jane Doe," he thought. "How did such a stunner get a name like that! It's like calling the Venus de Milo Fanny McGoo or the Mona Lisa Hattie Crump!"

The girl had stopped writing and was obviously reading the text. Mr. Geer caught his breath. There was something odd about her at that moment. He couldn't put his finger on it, and acting on a sudden impulse he strolled



The name Jane Doe fitted her like a Hamburg fits a mathball!

casually to the back of the room and standing over her asked her to see him after class.

For many nights afterwards as he lay in his lonely bed in his hotel room—Mr. Geer preferred a hotel to the usual boarding house because he felt it gave him more privacy—he lived over that moment when Jane Doe lifted her eyes to his.

There had been an almost painful shock as their eyes met. He instantly recalled, when he was five years old, putting his finger into an empty light socket to see if his hand would light up. The jolt he got made him whoop and leap about the room; the shock he got when her dark eyes met his was even worse, but now he could not whoop and leap around the room.

He bit his lip and clung to the desk-top behind him, trying valiantly to control an undignified contraction of his body. Then she had given a demure nod and lowered her eyes, mercifully turning the current off. As Mr. Geer walked down the aisle he hoped nobody would notice that he was wobbling.

"Oh, yes," he said when the bell had rung and she stood obediently before his desk.

He tried to keep his voice normal, but he realized he was trembling. "I was just wondering. It's a hobby of mine to guess a person's nationality by his name, but I must say—"

"Are you critical of my name, Mr. Geer?" she asked, frowning, with ever so slight a trace of accent.

"Not at all. It's just that it gives me no clue to your nationality."

"I'm just American, like everybody else," she said with a wonderful smile, and Mr. Geer noticed that where her frown had been, there was a white perpendicular scar about three-quarters of an inch long.

"What else would I be, living in America?"

"I suppose I should have said 'descent.'"

"Descent?" Jane Doe looked puzzled as if the concept were a new and unfamiliar one to her.

"Well, the United States is made up of people from all nations of the world, Jane. Your parents or your parents' parents must have come here from somewhere else."

"Oh!" For a moment she looked disturbed. "Well, I don't know about that. My real parents are—dead. I was adopted. But now I'd better

get on to class, Mr. Geer." And she was gone.

For the next two weeks Jane Doe would sit at her desk without looking at him when he spoke or even when she recited. It bothered him considerably, because he had never been so much drawn to one of his students, nor more curious about one. He took to watching her closely.

Inside of a week he found that the character of Jane Doe did not make sense.

He knew almost immediately, as all good teachers would, that Jane Doe was highly intelligent. And yet her class work was mediocre. She struck him as intensely individualistic, and at the same time she traveled with a clique and dressed like them. From her theme papers he discovered she had an amazing vocabulary although her daily speech to her classmates appeared almost deficient. Once he found her reading a newspaper-covered book during recitation and was astounded to find it was *Novum Organum*, by Immanuel Kant. That same day she was elected president of her class while the students yelled and cheer leaders did backward flips.

It was towards the end of

the fourth week that Mr. Geer had his first flash of intuition and at first it practically scared him to death. A less imaginative man might have passed over the warning signals, but Mr. Geer was an inveterate reader of science fiction, and the possibility of extra-terrestrial invasion was a matter he often considered more seriously than he did the chances of an increase in income tax on unmarried men.

He had just given the class a test and was watching one Gary Carson, a tow-headed, snub-nosed mesomorph as he scratched his head, squeezed up his eyes, pulled his ears and shuffled his feet.

He looked from Gary around the room, was suddenly reminded that the process of thinking was a painful one and was invariably accompanied by action of some kind. The room was quiet and the students apparently motionless, but actually there was a subtle undercurrent of movement. It was expressed by faint sighs, twitchings of fingers, the fluttering of eyelids. All around the class moved like many points of a single entity, all except—His heart skipped a beat as he caught sight of Jane looking down at her test paper.

pencil in hand—for Jane was the only exception.

She was truly motionless, lifeless, like a statue. And then he knew what it was that had caught his attention about her on the first day of school. It was this unnatural immobility, this alien freezing of all motion. Alien? Wouldn't it be strange now if— The thought that had started as a joke suddenly lit up with nerve-shattering reality, like a toy bomb that had exploded. He went back to his desk and sat down.

It was as if a gate had opened in his mind, and substantiating evidence of past observances came rushing forth to bolster his incredible suspicion.

Just the previous day when he had the class fold a model letter properly and place it into an envelope, he had seen that the little finger of Jane's right hand hung like a lifeless appendage. Later he saw the little finger of her left hand appeared just as limp and useless. What sort of accident would be responsible for that? Was it congenital?

He hovered between a sane disbelief and a peculiar exultation of suspicion as he thought of other things. Of Jane looking like a statue. Of Jane with a mysterious little

white scar between her eyes. Of Jane with her jet-black hair and eyes, and her probing gaze that had shocked him to his foundation.

Mr. Geer lived an active dream life, and that night he had one of the most vivid in his experience. He saw Jane sitting at his desk, looking as she had that first day. But now the shock was pleasant and he was drawn with great feelings of love towards her. She got up hastily and made him sit down, and then she bent over and kissed him.

"You see, you love me," she said and her voice was the most beautiful Mr. Geer had ever heard. "Remember that!"

The next moment her black hair and eyes turned a shimmering white like spun glass and a small eye appeared between her brows as she laid her four-fingered hand on his cheek. Mr. Geer thought Jane Doe was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen.

He awoke with the conviction that he experienced a revelation. He did love Jane Doe, and although his everyday mind rejected the idea that she was an alien, it was a thought he could not shake, and he knew he must delve into her background.

The school file didn't reveal much. Jane had been transferred at the beginning of the semester from another small school in the foothills. The only significant fact was the notation that a physical examination of the girl had been prohibited by her foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Saxon.

One Friday afternoon after the first marking period, knowing that Jane would be tied up at school by a session of the student council, Mr. Geer drove out to see the Saxons.

Mrs. Saxon was a small, faded red-head around forty-five who greeted him as if he were an unwelcome tradesman and admitted him to her parlor only after a struggle of wills. Mr. Saxon appeared from the kitchen in his undershirt. He was a hairy-chested Viking gone puffily to seed and in his hand he held a glass of beer.

"I've come to see what can be done about improving Jane's grades," he told Saxon uneasily.

"What's the matter with 'em?" growled the other.

"Well, they're not as good as they could be, I mean—well—Jane is a very capable girl. She should be doing 'A' work, not 'C'."

"Ain't 'C' good enough?" demanded Saxon.

"Not good enough for Jane," said Mr. Geer with a show of spirit. "You see, if she wants to go to college later on—"

"By the time she gets to college she won't be our worry any more!"

"Mert means," put in Mrs. Saxon hurriedly, "that when a girl gets to college age she's old enough to do things for herself."

"Be glad to get rid of her," the Viking mumbled in a beery voice.

"Well, it might be that her grades will improve of themselves," said Mr. Geer, hastily changing the subject. "What do you do for a living, Mr. Saxon?"

"I'm—retired!" he said as if he dared something to be made of it.

"You're very lucky to be able to retire so early in life, Mr. Saxon. What sort of work did—"

"Will that be all, Mr—?" said Mrs. Saxon hurriedly again.

"Yes, I think so. Except—How long have you had Jane with you?"

"Now look here, you!" Saxon rose threateningly from the sofa. "You may be a teacher, but that don't give

you no right to go puttin' your nose where it—"

"Mert!" Mr. Geer could see the woman was terrified. "Be careful of what you say!"

Whereupon Saxon pressed his foamy lips tight and walked out of the room, and Mr. Geer presently followed his example.

The following Monday morning Mr. Geer found Jane Doe waiting for him in his classroom when he unlocked his door.

"I hope you didn't mind," she said. "The janitor let me in. I told him I had some studying to do."

"You're always welcome, Jane," he said and tried to cover his confusion by pretending to put his desk top in order.

Jane Doe rose from her seat now and walked down the aisle towards him with smiling self-possession.

"I want to thank you for your interest in my grades," she said, and the current was on in her eyes again.

"What I can't understand, Jane,"—he was a little startled at his own bluntness—"is why you pretend to be so mediocre to the other students. You make an act of it; I've watched you."

"It's part of my training,"

she said, and Mr. Geer felt there was a ring of truth in it.

"You mean you wish to learn to deceive others about your true worth?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you that, Mr. Geer. There are certain things you would not tell to anyone else? Well—"

"Jane, it's because I am so interested in you I'm going to ask you a personal question. Are you very fond of your foster parents?"

She paused. "I do not care about them much, one way or another."

"Ah! They're very frightened people, you know."

"Frightened?"

"Hadn't you ever noticed?"

"No," she said with finality and went to the door. "Thank you again for your interest, Mr. Geer. Although—perhaps it would be better for you if you didn't—investigate—any further."

In the ensuing weeks Jane's attitude in class was reversed. Her written work became more brilliant, her class recitations improved, and she became the "A" student Mr. Geer had wanted her to be.

She no longer avoided his eye, but watched him con-

stantly. This he found a little unnerving at times, but each night he carried home in his heart the growing impression that Jane was coming to love him as much as he loved her. However, he felt that in order to make progress towards a complete understanding, he would have to know more about her, and since she would tell him nothing, he would have to rely on his own investigations.

He had exhausted the possibilities of the office file and the parents' home. Next he sent a letter to her previous school asking for additional tests and school records. He least expected the answer he got. Although it was from this office of the registrar that Jane's original transcript had been sent, the letter from the school secretary now stated that no one by the name of Jane Doe had ever been enrolled there.

Thinking the matter over carefully, Mr. Geer decided to take a school day off and investigate the matter for himself. Jane's transcript had been sent from a school in Quartzville, a little town on the mother lode about a hundred and fifty miles away, and it took Mr. Geer four hours of purposeful driving over narrow sierra roads to make

it. He parked his coupe in front of the high school building and went in.

Forty-five minutes later he came out a very shaken man, and he was well on his way home before his thoughts began to calm down and he realized that his investigation had just begun . . .

By Friday of the following week Mr. Geer felt that he had discovered enough for him to take Jane aside and face her with it. But Jane's class came and went and he said nothing. Now that he was much closer to the truth, he found himself reluctant to bring it into the open.

After school he sat at his desk for twenty minutes, half hoping that Jane would come in of her own accord and decide the issue. But though she passed in the hall once and looked in, she did not enter.

On Saturday morning, after a sleepless night, Mr. Geer packed himself a lunch and drove out into the woods a few miles north of the town. He often liked to take a leisurely hike up to the fire tower on Greenhorn Mountain, especially around this time of the year when the tower was deserted. Just below the space cleared for the look-out was a broad ledge

of rock which provided sanctuary and a wonderful view calculated to soothe Mr. Geer's spirit whenever he had need.

He arrived at the rock ledge after about an hour's walk, and since the exertion invariably made him ravenous, he settled himself at once for his lunch. As he ate his eyes moved back and forth over the skyline of pines and cedars, but for once he did not see them.

For the first time he began to have his doubts about what he had done. He had been so immersed in his own feelings about the girl, he had not seen the possible danger to himself and others, or if he had seen it he had suppressed it, buried it under his sudden and inexplicable passion for her. Out here he seemed to be able to think more clearly, and he was actually beginning to consider another and more normal course of action when he heard the scrape of rock behind him. Looking up he saw Jane standing on the ridge directly above, watching him.

"I hope you don't mind that I followed you," she said as she slid down the smooth granite and sat beside him. She wore a thin white shirt, open at the throat and pedal

pushers. The model bobby-soxer.

"Do you have a car of your own?" asked Mr. Geer, forcing his words out.

"I borrowed *their* car . . . I had to see you, I knew that we'd have to talk, sooner or later."

"Yes," said Mr. Geer gravely. Already he found himself forgetting the noble resolutions of a few moments before.

"You know quite a lot about me now, don't you?" she asked casually and lay back against the rock with her hands behind her head. In the bright sunlight the scar showed more vividly white and ridged. Mr. Geer thought she had never looked more beautiful.

"Yes, Jane, I do."

"Tell me all you know."

"All right . . . I know that you probably weren't born on earth."

"That's right," she nodded gaily. "May I have a little coffee? I've learned to like coffee very much." She poured the hot liquid from his thermos. "Go on."

"I found others like you. There was one in Quartzville, scar, little finger and all. She worked in the office and faked your record. I visited several

schools, and in each there was just one of you. Of course I realize you wouldn't dare get together because your physical characteristics would give you away. How many schools have you penetrated?"

"Thousands—all over the country," she said complacently, sipping her coffee. "And do you know *why*?"

"I think I can figure it out. You're learning how to act naturally in a democratic form of government, how to manipulate the masses in order to get elected to key positions. You settled on our public schools as the best place to learn the democratic process. For some reason you cannot, or will not, use violent methods. I think you've decided on a sort of long term—infiltration."

"You're partly right and partly wrong," Jane said. "We do not wish to use violence. However, if anything interferes with our plan, we have—natural—weapons."

"One thing amused me, Jane," said Mr. Geer, enjoying himself. "You went overboard in trying to be inconspicuous, especially in your choice of names. Jane Doe, Ann Brown, Mary Smith. Actually, such common names will only draw attention to you."

"I'll report our error, thank you," she said primly.

"One thing I can't understand, though. Why do you find it necessary to be adopted by people like the Saxons?"

"We've always understood the American idealized a great personage who had come up from the masses. Perhaps we've been too literal there, too. I'll admit it's been very trying sometimes."

"By the way, what is your real name?"

"Thericae."

"Beautiful," said Mr. Geer and took her hand boldly in his. "But why haven't I seen any men? Where are they?"

"We keep them at home."

"You keep—" Mr. Geer was startled. "Then you are the dominant sex!"

"Is that so very strange? In not so many years it will be the same here."

"Never!"

"Why do you suppose we have chosen the United States? It is, as you say, a 'natural'—for woman domination. By the time my people are trained for high offices—"

"But the men will oppose you!"

"I told you, we have natural weapons."

"But—"

(Concluded on page 122)

HOLE IN THE AIR

By ROBERT SILVERBERG

At exactly the time Derke Berish realized he was about to lose everything, a small boy showed the sure way to save it. All you had to do, it seemed, was to find a hole in the air, climb through and help yourself to fame and fortune. Worked fine too...until Derke found out that he wasn't the only one fond of fame and fortune!

IT HAD been a bad day for Derke Berish. First had come Kanner's memorandum, implying in veiled terms that Berish was doing a pretty feeble job these days, and immediately after that Production Chief Sunetaro had rejected Berish's sphincter fountain-pen design on the grounds that it was cumbersome and had little sales appeal.

Berish slouched glumly behind his black, shabby designing desk and idly toyed with the two slips of paper: Kanner's harsh white one, Sunetaro's gentler green. Kanner's with its sedate mes-

sage typed in dark brown, neat inch-wide margins all around, and Sunetaro's scribbled in the Production Chief's near-cunieforn. They both added up to the same thing: Berish was in a slump, and unless he could regain the touch that had brought forth gadget after gadget for years, Amalgamated Technologicals would have a new design chief and Berish would be scouting the employment shy-sters again.

His gaze wandered over the busy little office. His three assistants were all bent over their designing-boards, munching on their styles and



Not only was he climbing into thin air—he was disappearing in it!

concentrating fiercely. Berish wondered which of them would eventually replace him—little rumped Rodriguez, or Condon, or Hellman? They were all clever, eager, bright-eyed, just as Berish had been when he first came to work for Amalgamated Technologicals.

As he sickly surveyed the office, he saw Condon leave his desk and move toward him. "Thought you might be interested in this," said Condon, putting a large marble down before him. Even in his gloom Berish admired the marble's beauty. It gleamed with a soft, soothing light, and right in its heart burnt a hard, bright little flame. It seemed almost like a precious gem.

"My boy found it yesterday," Condon said, with that too-eager smile of the underling who wants to move up. "Really interesting gimmick, sir."

Berish fondled the marble for a moment and looked up slowly at Condon. He felt terribly tired; all the weight of the world seemed to have been lowered onto his thin shoulders this bleak morning.

"It's very pretty, Mr. Condon," Berish said. "I admire your taste in marbles." He

yawned. "But just why should I—"

Bag-eyed old has-been!

Abruptly Berish awoke. "What was that, Mr. Condon?"

"What, sir?" said Condon, turning fish-white.

"Repeat what you just said to me, Condon."

"But I didn't say anything, sir. This marble—"

Berish slumped back in the chair. Now I'm starting to come apart at the seams, he thought. Hearing things is just about the end. I'll cashier out at 1700.

"Go ahead," Berish snapped. "Tell me about the marble."

I would if you'd let me.

"Didn't you just say, 'I would if you'd let me'?" Berish asked.

"No, sir, but it was in my mind," Condon said. "That's the thing about this marble. It transmits thoughts."

Berish let the marble drop as if it were a glowing coal, and it rolled along the desk. It came to a rest next to Sune-taro's note. He looked at it, entranced by its glowing radiance.

"Just where did you get this thing, Mr. Condon?" Berish asked after he had calmed down.

"You may not believe this, Mr. Berish," Condon began, "but my son claims he found it in another dimension."

It had been a bad day for Berish, all right. First Kanner, then Sunetaro, now a telepathic marble from another dimension. He stared blankly at the balding head of Hellman, still bent over his designing-board, and then turned his gaze up coldly at Condon. The young design assistant looked back at him calmly.

"You say your boy got it from another dimension, Condon? He didn't merely fly to Mars for it?"

"Please, Mr. Berish," Condon said, a trifle wearily. "I know it sounds fantastic. But where he got it doesn't matter, does it? The fact remains that we have it, and it has definite commercial possibilities."

Berish's eye flickered toward Kanner's polite note still before him, and at the marble. Yes, yes, of course, Berish thought, picking up the marble again and watching the hypnotic dancing of the dot of fire in its heart. Definite commercial possibilities. He felt the bleakness starting to lift.

"Think something at me, Mr. Condon."

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

"The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog?"

Condon nodded.

Berish weighed the marble in the palm of his hand. "This could be something exciting," he said, thinking of Kanner and Sunetaro and the whole faceless management of Amalgamated Technologicals to whom he was nothing more than a machine for designing gadgets, to be cast off and replaced when worn out. This was quite a gadget, all right. And perhaps there would be more where this one came from. With a little shrewdness—

"I didn't know what to say at first," Condon said. "Nine-year-old boys have a way of vanishing at mealtimes, and when I went out to get him I couldn't find him. Yesterday, around 1800. My wife doesn't like dinner time to be too late. But I looked all over for Ronnie, and there was no sign of him. He always tells us if he's leaving the block. I started over next door to see if he was playing indoors, when suddenly he tumbled out of what I can only describe, sir, as a hole in the air—"

"—and he was holding this marble clutched in his grimy

little paw. I see the picture, Mr. Condon." Berish looked down at the marble, then querulously up at Condon. "Think something at me, Mr. Condon." He grasped the marble.

This is the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

"Is it, Condon?"

"All I can tell you is what Ronnie said," replied Condon. "He said he had walked into a hole in the air and came across some alien monsters playing marbles. He sat right down with them and won this marble."

Berish smiled. "And you believe this? That a small boy would play marbles so fearlessly with alien monsters? If I'd been there—or you, or anyone—I'd have run away."

"But not Ronnie," Condon said. "He's been raised on TV; I can't keep him away from the set. He's more at home in outer space and alien dimensions than he is in his own house."

"Ah, then. What we have here is nothing but the workings of a young boy's fertile imagination."

"Quite possibly," said Condon. "But that still doesn't account for this," he said, reaching out and tapping the marble.

"No," said Berish. "It

doesn't," he added reflectively. "I think I'll come home with you tonight, if you don't mind. I'd like to have a chat with your son. This may prove to be very, very profitable for us all, Condon."

Four hours later Berish was comfortably enfolded by an immense armchair in Condon's neat little suburban home, facing a wiry, brown-haired, freckle-faced little boy.

"Let's go over this slowly, Ronnie," Berish said, struggling to calm his frayed nerves. "You say you saw a hole in the air."

"That's right," Ronnie said. "I twisted myself around and *scrunched* and I went through."

"I see," said Berish. "You *scrunched*. I've got the idea of it. Have a popstick?"

"Not before supper," broke in Condon, as Ronnie reached eagerly for the proffered sweet. Berish shook his head and put the popstick back in its wrapper.

"Tell me what you saw there, Ronnie."

The boy's eyes widened. "When I got there I was by a big tree and there were five aliens around a ring and they were about so high, with lots of arms and purple and green

scales, and they live in a big world with nothing but trees and white concrete and no houses or cars or grownups or anything, and I got there through this hole in the air next door. They were playing marbles, just like we do here, except there wasn't anyone to play with the other morning or I wouldn't have gone through the hole in the air." Ronnie caught in his breath sharply.

Berish closed his eyes for a moment and gathered in his thoughts. No matter how much fibbing Ronnie was doing, the marble did come from some place. And if Ronnie's story were true, if there were a universe next door overflowing with wonders, he, Derke Berish, held the key.

The key was a small boy's curiosity. A nine-year-old is curious about all things: about frogs and eels and stun-ball averages and rocket ships and certainly doubly curious about a strange world on the other side of a hole in the air. If Ronnie could be persuaded to go back through, again and again—

"You got the marble over there?" Berish asked.

"Yessir. I made contact with them the way Captain Space does, and they let me join their game when they

saw I was a peaceful—uh—entity, and I won the marble and brought it back and gave it to Dad and I was late for supper."

Berish glanced at Condon, who sat to one side, impassively. "How would you like to take me outside and show me where the hole in the air is, Ronnie?" Berish asked.

"Why don't you wait until after supper?" Condon said. "My wife will have things ready any minute."

"Tell her to wait a moment, will you, Condon? This is pretty important. Come on, Ronnie." *Here I come*, Berish thought.

Berish muffled Condon's protest with a gesture of a hand. Ronnie led Berish outside into the alleyway that separated the Condon house from the one next to it. Berish watched anxiously as Ronnie wandered up and down the alleyway, searching in the gathering dusk. Abruptly he brightened. "Here it is, Mr. Berish!" he called. He pointed up. "There."

Berish squinted. "I don't see anything," he said, and got the sickly suspicion that he was the victim of a wild, purposeless hoax. "Show me."

Ronnie outlined a space

about three feet high. "It shimmers, like. It's hard to tell in the dark, but this is the place."

Berish contemplated it for a moment. "Ronnie?"

"Yessir?"

"Your father's not looking. Here's the popstick."

"But he said—"

"Never mind. Would you show me how you go through the hole in the air?"

"You mean you want me to go through? Right now?"

"Yes," Berish said, trying to look like a kindly uncle. "And when you go through—I'd like you to try to find the aliens again, and make them give you some other toy of theirs."

"You mean you want another marble, Mr. Berish?"

"Yes—no," he said patiently. "Not another marble, just yet. Any other kind of toy. All right?" He gave Ronnie what he hoped was a jolly nudge. The boy peered into the dimness for a moment, then bent down—scrunched—and, slowly straightening from his contorted position, stepped through. Berish thought he caught a glimpse of a wide, spreading ocean of white sand, broken here and there by a few tall, grotesque trees outlined against a lemon-yellow sky, and then Ron-

nie vanished and the gateway closed over.

"Where's Ronnie?" Condon demanded, bursting out of the house.

"It was true," Berish said, ignoring him.

"What was true? Do you mean you've sent him back again? Why, we don't know what might be back there. Ferocious alien monsters, anything at all—and you let him go through!"

Berish ignored Condon's anxious exclamations. He was dreamily contemplating the hole in the air, wondering what marvels would come forth to be placed before the astonished eyes of Kanner and Sunetaro and the high forces of Amalgamated Technologicals.

"Berish!" Condon finally shouted. The shout reminded Berish both that Condon was present and that he was an underling who had no business shouting, and he turned to face him.

"Please, Condon. Your boy won't be in any danger, and he'll be right back. This may mean great things for us, Condon."

"Great things! What about my son?"

"Here he is," Berish said. Ronnie stepped back through

the hole and tumbled down at Berish's feet. Berish lifted him up.

He had brought back a top—a child's spinning top, off-green with dark blue dots. Berish wondered wildly if the aliens had used polka-dot paint to paint it, and then he seized the toy from Ronnie and examined it with frantic curiosity.

He put it on the ground and spun it, gently. It wobbled around and keeled over.

"No, Mr. Berish. You've got to give it a good twist," Ronnie said, bending down in the growing dusk. He took the top, his small, dirty fingers barely able to grip it, and started it off with a flick of his wrist.

It rose about five feet off the ground and hovered there, floating lightly and easily.

It was inevitable, Berish thought, that Condon would try to monkey-wrench the whole thing. Miracles never happened smoothly.

"Look here," Berish said. "We have a whole alien universe opening up before us—a complete immense new technology. The first two things we've brought back from there have given us telepathic contact and now antigravity. There's no telling

what further treasures can come through the gateway."

"Exactly," said Condon. "And that's why we should turn the whole business over to the government and let them explore this other universe."

"Why can't you understand?" said Berish, mustering his patience. "You and I are employees of Amalgamated Technologicals. And there is money in these two gadgets for Amalgamated Technologicals, and that means there's money for us. If we turn this over to the government, they'll grab the antigrav top and the marble and turn them into federal monopolies. Just watch. You want to earn seventy credits a week for the rest of your life?"

"Mr. Berish is right, Ralph," said Condon's wife. Startled at aid coming from an unexpected quarter, Berish whirled to look at her, seeing her almost for the first time. "We could let Ronnie go through a couple of more times, and that'll be enough. We'll all be rich."

"And suppose something happens to him?" Condon said.

"Don't worry, Dad," said Ronnie. "They're very nice, even if they're so funny-look-

ing with all those arms and that one big eye. And they use those marbles to speak. The one I spoke to gave me the top and said something about exchanging."

"Exchange?"

"Uh-huh," Ronnie said. "I forget what he told me—something about being very anxious to exchange."

"There you are," exclaimed Berish triumphantly. "We've opened negotiations already!" He cleared his throat nervously, and plunged on. "I don't think there's need for any further discussion. It's established that Ronnie's the only one who can fit through that hole—or even find it, for that matter—and it is established that the aliens are friendly and anxious to exchange important things with us, through the medium of Ronnie. It would be an act of criminal negligence to fail to take advantage of this opportunity for contact with another race."

"And why let the federal government take all the profit when we can use the money?" demanded Mrs. Condon happily.

"But suppose—what if—"

"Those people are nice, Dad."

"Might I add, Mr. Condon, that should you insist on

turning this discovery over to the government, Amalgamated Technologicals might not appreciate such an action?"

Condon nodded weakly, and Berish smiled. It was a smile of victory. He could almost hear the trumpets in the background.

"Are you ready for your trip—ah, next door, Ronnie?"

Ronnie held a small portable generator firmly in both hands. Berish had been quite pleased with himself for making the suggestion that perhaps the aliens might never have discovered electricity. Perhaps, Berish hazarded, they had made use of some other power source from the start—mental power, perhaps—and had never been provoked into controlling electricity. The generator might open up new worlds of technological advance for the aliens, and who knew what they might give in their gratitude?

Berish had gone over Ronnie's instructions patiently. "You want me to find an alien and explain that this is an exchange sent by Earth and get something from him in return."

"Exactly!" Berish said. "You have a very intelligent son, do you know?" he said,

turning to Condon, who stood by nervously.

"Come back quickly," Condon said. "I wish you wouldn't make him do this."

"We've been through this before," Berish said coldly.

"Suppose something happens to him? You're letting a youngster go exploring an unknown universe—"

"Will you be quiet?" Berish snapped. "I've had enough of your worries, Condon. Go inside. I'll call you when Ronnie comes back."

Berish waited anxiously for fifteen minutes, and found himself getting a little worried too. Ronnie was certainly a bright, attractive little boy, and he couldn't blame Condon for worrying about him. He paced up and down the alleyway.

At last Ronnie returned. Berish stared, wondering what he had brought back.

Ronnie held out a small globe in which a bizarre black fishlike animal paddled sedately back and forth in a green, brackish-looking liquid.

"How nice," Berish said, concealing his sharp disappointment. "A pet." Inwardly he raged; an animal was of no use to him.

Condon appeared, and look-

ed at the animal. "Doesn't seem like we've profited much this time," he said. "I guess you'll send him back for something else."

Berish stood quietly in thought. "Ronnie," he said, "go back. Tell your friend to widen the gateway, if he can. Big enough for a grown-up."

Ronnie turned, *scrunched*, went through. A moment later he stepped out.

"It's all right, Mr. Berish," he said. "Lennid widened it. And they're looking forward to an exchange."

Berish's eyes brightened. Here, he thought, here's the chance to go through and handle things myself. No more clumsy dealing through a little boy; I'll go straight to the source and pick out the best they've got.

He let his mind dwell on the possible treasures of the world next door. Time travel? Transmutation? Teleportation? Whatever they had, he'd figure out some sort of exchange and get it from them, without manipulating at long range through Ronnie. That was too inefficient, he thought, looking at the fishbowl.

If they have anti-gravity and telepathy, Berish reflected, they can have anything

(Concluded on page 130)



The Thirty Thousand Stiffs

By IVAR JORGENSEN

So I happened to be doing fifty-five in a thirty-five-mile zone. So I got a ticket for speeding. Happens to the best of us, and this was a cop you couldn't bribe. Only, why should the cop and the entire city turn to stone two minutes afterward? That they couldn't blame on me!

THE cop took off his visored cap and ran a hand through his wet hair. "You were doing fifty-five," he said, relishing the words, "in a thirty-five zone." He took out his pad and began to write a ticket. His motorcycle, which had over-heated in the hot sticky atmosphere, throbbed,

coughed and conked out.

"I'm sorry, officer," I said, using my politest tone but wishing I could clip him one in the teeth because he was standing there, leaning against the fender of my Chevy and writing the ticket with a look of quiet pleasure on his face.



the tiger look it lying down!

"They charge a dollar a mile in the courthouse," he said, handing back my license.

"That's a lot of money for a traveling salesman without an expense account."

"You know," he said, "that's tough."

I put the license back in my wallet and ruffled the greenbacks in the money compartment. If he was a cop who took bribes, he would get the idea. "I was just trying to get to Center City before dark," I said.

"Well, you made it. Was it worth twenty bucks?"

I shrugged. He watched my fingers on the money and shook his head. "Don't do it, buster," he said. "If you suggested a bribe I'd run you in fast as you was going when I flagged you."

I returned the wallet to my pocket, still wishing I could poke him one. "Lousy smog, huh?" he said conversationally. The ticket meant nothing to him. It was like selling me a loaf of bread.

I looked up at the heavy gray sky, hanging low over the flat brown midwestern countryside. I could feel my eyes smarting with the smog.

"Local weather bureau calls it an inversion layer. Something about cold air on top holding hot air and industrial

smoke down low to the ground. Some cranks around here claim it's going to mean trouble."

"What kind of trouble?" I didn't give a damn, but I thought if I acted interested he might have a change of heart about the summons."

"They don't know. Just shooting off their mouths. The cumulative effect, they say. Whatever the hell that is. Well, here's your ticket."

"Thanks," I said.

"You a wise guy?"

"No, sir. I only said thanks."

He walked over to the motorcycle and got one leg over it. He hung that way and looked at me. I waited for him to say something. He didn't say anything. He kept on hanging that way, his leg over the cycle seat, his rear end not quite touching it. I began to think it was a good trick. I started the motor of my Chevvy, waiting for him to kick over the motorcycle's four cylinders. But he was still standing that way, canted at a thirty degree angle, dangling over the seat of the motorcycle without touching it.

Up ahead on the road there was a loud crashing sound. I looked and saw a late model

car, done in three pastel colors and looking pretty as an ad in *Life* magazine, go zig-zagging out of control through the post-and-cable fence which bordered the road. "Hey, officer!" I yelled. "Did you see that?"

He was still slanting toward me, sitting on air, balanced awkwardly on one foot. I got out of the car and went over to him. I put my hand on his shoulder and pointed to where the car had gone through the cables, two hundred yards up the road. He kept on looking at me, without blinking, without moving a muscle. I leaned down on his shoulder. He fell over the motorcycle suddenly, bringing it down in the dust alongside him. He lay on his back with one leg up in the air, as if he were still standing like that but the whole world had tilted ninety degrees over on its side.

I bent over him. Heart attack? I wondered. But rigor mortis takes a few hours to set in, and it isn't that *stiff*. I tried to ease his right leg down to the ground but couldn't. I stood looking at him for few seconds. Then I leaned down suddenly, took the summons book from his back pocket and tore up his copy of the ticket he had given me. I put my hand against his chest

but couldn't feel any heart-beat. Somehow, though, he didn't look dead. I had the wild notion that he had just been *shut off* and was waiting to be turned on again.

I was sweating when I climbed into the Chevy. I drove on toward Center City, intending to stop at the accident I had seen. But when I approached it I could see two more breaks in the fence, two more cars which had gone plowing across farmer somebody's south forty. Further down the road a trailer truck was stalled at an angle across the asphalt. There was barely room to get around it, and when I did I wished the clearance had been at the back, not the front end of the truck. Because I saw the driver sitting in his cab, peering intently ahead as if he were still driving, a cigarette dangling from his lips with a long ash on it.

I pushed the Chevy's gas pedal down to the floorboards and raced into the heart of Center City. Don't get any wild ideas, Walter, I told myself. That's me, Walter Carroll. This can all be explained, somehow. In Center City they'll know what it's all about. Just wait until you get to the city.

That's what I did, if you can call doing eighty along a

three-lane blacktop highway waiting. Only it was worse in Center City.

Midwestern industrial town of thirty thousand. You know the type. Two or three big factories belching smoke into the hot summer air, raining soot and cinders down on everybody's backyard and making them wish they lived someplace else, even in Pittsburgh. But they remained there because the big factories, making hard goods or maybe airplane parts for the Air Force or TV sets, gave them employment.

Right now, though, they weren't thinking about that. I didn't believe they were thinking about anything. They were like the cop or the truck driver driving no place at all, or the fellows who had plowed across the farmer's field.

They had all been turned to statues.

I parked across the street from the big, make-believe-classic City Hall. There was a little park in front of it and late afternoon strollers were out for a whiff of the smog-laden air. Strolling, except that it was like a moving picture which someone had stopped, showing one stationary frame only. Guy with one foot in the air. Kids frozen in the

act of running. Old man on a bench forever turning the same page of his newspaper. Little pigeon statues at his feet, eyeing a bag of peanuts he had but not doing anything about it.

Hold on, Walter, I thought. It's the heat. You're seeing things. I walked over to the old man with the peanuts. "Nice day," I said, still thinking I could snap myself out of it. He held the newspaper up in a position that would have tired his arms in a few seconds. The wind ruffled the paper. I took it from his hands, but he didn't drop his arms. I reached for the bag of peanuts and tried one. They were good. I shelled a few of them and tossed them among the pigeons. They just stood there, still watching where the bag had been.

I sell ties for Finch, Benner and Son, out of New York. It's a living, but I'm not getting rich. I have a fair education, but it isn't the kind that puts alphabet soup after your name. I couldn't understand things like this, but at the moment I didn't think Einstein could, either. And I got to thinking. It frightened me.

I'd torn up the cop's ticket. I'd taken the old man's newspaper, and his peanuts. They didn't mind. They were stat-

ues, Center City had come to a grinding halt. At least, every living thing in it had. The idea scared me. But it was the kind of scare which sends goose pimples down your spine. I could walk into the First National Bank and take what I wanted. I could do exactly as I pleased and none of the statues would mind. I could walk out of Center City with a million bucks in loot and toss my sample case of ties back in Finch, Benner and Son's faces.

Except, I thought, that Center City is probably perfectly normal and you're crazy as the proverbial hoot owl.

It was Center City's finest hotel, and it looked mighty nice. I made my way among the statues to the desk. I was getting used to them, the perpetually smiling statues, the scowling ones, the poker-faced ones, those frozen in the act of taking a step. The desk clerk was leaning on his elbows and studying a girl at the far end of the lobby. I had already seen her and she was pretty. A pretty statue. The desk clerk was a politely leering statue.

I didn't ask him for a room. At first I was going to sign the register, but I changed my mind in a hurry. There was no sense advertising the fact that

I'd been here, if I intended to go ahead with those nice ideas I had. Nice? Well, it depended. It depended on how long everyone went on being statues.

I went around behind the desk and took a key. 347, it said. I went to the elevator with my two suitcases, one for me and one for Finch, Benner and Son. The elevator boy had a going-up look on his face, but he wasn't going anywhere, not without help. I gave him the help he needed. I took the elevator up to the third floor and found my room. A man and a woman stood in the hall, waiting for the elevator. They went right on waiting when I opened the gate. Inside Room 347, I unpacked my bag. It was almost completely dark outside now, but the usual sounds of a city on the brink of night were absent. Mostly, you missed the traffic sounds. A city seemed mighty strange without them.

I shrugged. Either I was nuts or this was the finest opportunity ever handed a man, up to and including the King for a Day TV show. Just to prove it to myself, I went out into the hall for a look-see. Start taking things, I told myself. There's no telling when they'll wake up. Taking things? But Walter, old boy,

you never did a dishonest thing in your life. Except about that traffic summons. Yes, that traffic summons. Why didn't you ever do a dishonest thing in your life, Walter? Go ahead and admit it. Why? Because you never had the opportunity. Like everyone else, you were always afraid of the consequences. Here in Center City, it doesn't look like there'll be any consequences.

The door to 341 was not locked. I walked inside. A couple of kids, male and female, were holding hands and frozen in the act of eating supper over one of those wheel-in tables. Honeymoon, I thought, looking at the quart of champagne in the silver ice-urn.

They each had a goblet of champagne in front of them. I drank both and licked my lips. Their steaks were getting cold. I thought of eating them but changed my mind and left them frozen there, to try my luck elsewhere.

337 was also not locked. She was a good-looking woman, if on the wrong side of thirty. She was getting dressed and hadn't gotten very far. She was frozen in the process of stepping into something pink and lacy. She was also studying herself in the mirror with

a pleased look on her face. For a gal pushing thirty-five, the look said, you're doing all right, Suzie. Yessir. I remained there long enough to agree with her, then got out. My palms were clammy. If it was what I wanted, I could be the most successful Peeping Thomas in the history of Peeping Thomases. I shrugged. It was nice, but there were nicer things.

Like the diamond bracelet in 329. I just looked but did not touch. I filed it away in my mind for future reference. I didn't want to admit it, but I was scared. And I began to get a little angry with myself. Opportunity. Not once in a lifetime, but once in a millenium. Never happen again. Don't just look, Walter. You'll regret it when the statues start hopping around again.

Most of the doors were locked, but 323 opened when I turned the knob. The room was empty, but female clothing was draped neatly across the back of a chair, the stockings very sheer and dangling like wraiths of fog, the black kid shoes lined up neatly under the chair. From the bathroom, I could hear the sound of the shower hissing away.

Now, Walter, I told myself. Stop thinking those things. They're not nice. Shame on

you, Walter. But my feet were already taking me towards the sound of the shower. The bathroom door was slightly ajar, and I pushed it open. You have absolutely no imagination, Walter, I chided myself. There are better things you can do than this. But the champagne had gone to my head because I hadn't eaten anything since early afternoon. I took a deep breath, told myself Walter would hate Walter later, and pulled back the shower curtain.

She was very beautiful, both in the way that you usually see a woman whose name you do not even know and in the way you don't. She was tan and pink and white and long limbed and lovely.

Only, she screamed.

She came out of the shower in a blurring flash of nakedness. Her right hand, soaking wet, streaked for my face and slapped it twice, stingingly. Her left hand yanked a large bath-towel off the wrack and draped it across her wet body.

"Just what the hell do you think you're doing?" she cried.

"Why, I—"

"All right, mister. You come with me to the phone. I'm calling the house detective. If you try and run away, I'll scream bloody murder."

"Listen," I said. "Listen—"

Her back was very straight under the damp bath-towel. The back of her neck and her shapely bare shoulders were flushed an angry red. She stalked like that into the bedroom and grasped the phone off its cradle. "Hello," she said. "Hello!"

"You don't understand," I said.

"If you don't shut up . . . hello! Hello!" She jiggled the phone's cradle. "It's out of order," she said, and added an unladylike curse-word.

"It's not out of order," I said. "It stopped."

"What do you mean, it stopped? Never mind. Just get out of here. I'll give you one chance. If you don't get right out of here . . ."

"Everything stopped," I said. "Statues."

She turned around slowly and looked at me. Like you look at vermin before you push the handle of the flit gun. "You," she said, "are not only a Peeping Tom. You're a stinking drunk."

"They're all statues out there," I offered lamely.

"Are you going to get out of here?"

"All right," I said. "I'll wait outside until you get dressed."

"You have your nerve!"

"No, really. You don't understand."

"I'll count three."

"Lady," I said, "something's happened. I don't know what but it scares the daylights out of you. You'll be glad for company."

"I don't know what you're talking about, but I wouldn't be glad for your company on a desert island the size of a tablecloth."

"Walter is my name," I said. "I'm in 347. When you see the folks at the elevator, maybe you'll want to come in for a talk."

"If you wait for that to happen, you'll starve to death."

I tried to smile at her, but she brandished the telephone, cradle and all. I offered her an apologetic smile, but she wasn't buying. I went outside and walked down the hall. The couple was still waiting, like two trees in the Petrified Forest, for the elevator.

I went back to my room and sat down on the bed, smoking a cigarette. Now that it was over, I was glad I had bumped into her. She hated my guts — and understandably — but when she saw what Center City was like, she might decide to bury the hatchet. I wondered if she'd have the kind thoughts I was having.

Maybe alone, I decided, anybody would. But two people together would sort of act as one another's conscience.

Out of habit, I leaned over and turned on the small radio on the nightstand. At first there was only the faint hum of the tubes warming, but suddenly a voice blared:

"Attention, Center City! Attention! This is National Guard Headquarters at the State Capitol calling. Urgent. We are beaming this message to all your licensed stations. If you receive, please respond."

"The world has lost all contact with you, Center City. Highways leading to Center City, railroads, even the air above the city, is barred to the outside world. It is as if a wall of force had suddenly appeared, out of nowhere, to block you off from all contact with the rest of the nation."

"We're attempting to help you, Center City. Physicists from the State University are even now examining this wall of force to see what has caused it. Meanwhile, we can only guess at what conditions are like inside Center City. If some catastrophe has befallen you, hang on!" the radio voice cried melodramatically, as if the Public Relations Officer of the National Guard unit responsible had been reading too

much purple prose recently. "We want to help you, Center City. If you hear this message, please respond."

There was a pause. Then: "Attention, Center City! Attention. This is National Guard Headquarters . . ."

I switched the radio dial to another station and heard the same thing. On my third try, I picked up an out-of-town station, on which a program of popular music was interrupted by an announcer who said: "Here is a bulletin from the CBS newroom: Center City, Ohio, a city of some thirty thousand, has suddenly and mysteriously been blocked off from the rest of the nation. It is as if a wall of force of unknown origin has sprung up. The wall—if it is a wall—is invisible but so far cannot be pierced by any weapon the Ohio National Guard has turned on it. There is speculation in some quarters that the unexpected smog which has blanketed the Midwest for the past several weeks is in some way responsible for the phenomena, which according to scientists at . . ."

I shut the radio off. They knew nothing, but they were guessing. I put out my cigarette. Then the girl came in.

Her hair, minus the bathing

cap, was a deep rich red. Her figure, in a sheer blouse and lightweight speckled tweed sheath of a skirt, was really something to see. I grinned at her. This time I could stare at her figure without feeling guilty. Dressed like that, it not only was meant to be stared at and admired, it was fairly crying for it.

"He-hello," she said timidly. Her face, which was quite beautiful and looked somehow like the face of a pert, mischievous child, if a frightened one, tried to smile. But her eyes, big and blue, wanted no part of it. "I—I looked around. In the hall. Downstairs. I don't know what to think. I thought maybe you—"

"Not me," I said. "I don't know a thing about it. I only know if we're the only two people around here who can walk and breathe and do things, we ought to stick together." I told her about what I had heard on the radio. Then I asked: "Are you new here in Center City?"

She nodded. "I arrived by plane this afternoon. I have a contract to sing in a nightclub here."

"So you just arrived. That ought to mean something."

"I don't understand."

"Well, I just got here too. Maybe whatever happened

had to happen over a long period of time. Maybe that's why we're not affected. Maybe we just got in under the wire before the wall of force appeared. So—"

"I see what you mean. There might be a hundred or so other people in Center City, just like us."

"You think we ought to find them?"

I shrugged. "I think we ought to go outside and get something to eat. Have dinner with me?"

First she frowned, then her face became radiant in a smile. "I'll forget all about before," she said.

"I want to apologize, I—"

"No, that's all right. I have no idea what I would have done, had I been in your place. No apologies necessary, Walter." I was pleasantly surprised that she had remembered my name. But listen," she was grinning again, "since everything's going to be free, I'll expect you to take me to the most expensive restaurant in town and—"

"Lady," I said, "you have got yourself a date."

"And, Walter?"

"Yeah?"

"I hope you don't mind a personal question."

"Shoot."

"Are you rich?"

"I don't look it, do I?"

"Because I was thinking."

"Yeah. So was I."

"We could get rich."

"I know."

"I mean we could—why, we could do anything."

"It sure does make you sit up and think."

"Walter, are you making fun of me?"

"No. But I went through all of that."

"What did you come up with?"

"I don't know. No answer yet."

"Why, you could walk into a bank and—"

"I know."

"A bank's just an example. Anyplace."

"Yeah."

"Walter, I'm scared. I don't know if I'm strong enough—"

"Do you want to be strong enough?"

"I don't know—that either. Walter—"

"Come here," I said. She did so. She knew what I had in mind and came straight for it. I tilted her chin back and looked at her eyes. I winked at her and she parted her lips to say something. I kissed her and all at once I was glad everything in Center City had stopped because it made that kiss possible.

Outside, a horn blew. We

looked at each other and ran to the window. We could see nothing. We looked at each other again and headed for the elevator. It looked like we were going to have company.

Every three seconds the horn would blow, holding it for two seconds, waiting three, blowing again. It was very hot on the street, with no wind blowing. You could smell the smog on the air. It made you want to cough. It made your eyes tear.

"He's over there," I said. I pointed at a car parked against the curb in front of the hotel. "Hello," I called. We walked over to the car.

"Well, it's about time. I knew everybody couldn't have died at once, frozen like that." A little old man was sitting behind the wheel of the car. He was well-dressed, complete with homburg, despite the hot humid weather. A fine network of wrinkles covered his face. It was bronzed, too, from much contact with the sun. It looked like the skin of a sweet potato that's beginning to shrivel.

"You just arrived?" I asked.

"Been driving around. Can't find a soul who—"

"Neither could we."

"Argalion's my name. Smog

expert over at the University."

We introduced ourselves. The girl said her name was Naomi Winters. "What University?" I said. His clothing didn't look like it would be at home on the campus of any University.

For some reason, Dr. Argalion began to laugh. He wiped his eyes, which started to tear, with a large handkerchief from his breast pocket. "Hop in," he said, leaning over and opening the door of his car. "I was going to grab a bite to eat. Join me?"

"All right," I said, looking at Naomi, who nodded.

We drove down State Street which, mostly, was dark. The absence of street lights and neons got you at first until you realized that the Center City citizens had all been shut off before it was time to turn on the lights.

Naomi clutched my hand as Dr. Argalion's car sped down the street. He had his headlights on, the brights up to pierce the gloom, and the way we swung from side to side in the front seat of the car, as Dr. Argalion swerved to avoid stalled vehicles with statues for drivers reminded me of slalom skiing. Then I couldn't help smiling. The situation was very real and could be

very dangerous, but it had a quality of fantasy about it and Dr. Argalion, whose face you could see in the dashboard light, seemed so unconcerned that you hardly realized he was doing forty miles an hour when he should have been crawling along.

"We'll go to the *Candlelight Inn*," he said, "so we don't have to grope around for the electricity. Candles, you see."

"Candles," I said.

"Here we are, folks." The car lurched to a sudden stop behind a panel truck. At the rear of the truck, a statue of a man was forever busy unloading a long French bread. He had several wrapped French breads under his left arm. His lips were pursed as if he were whistling.

We went inside, passing a doorman statue. It was a snooty place which I could not have afforded on my salary plus commissions. I went around to a few of the tables, lighting candles. The diners were frozen in various attitudes of eating, lifting forkfuls of food to their open mouths, wiping their lips with napkins, forever sipping drinks. It was eerie.

"You're my guests," Dr. Argalion said as we seated ourselves at an empty table.

"I'll go in the kitchen and see what I can find."

"He's a strange person," Naomi said after Dr. Argalion had disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

"What do you mean, strange?"

"He seems so unconcerned."

"Yeah. I was thinking that too."

"Do you think he's really a smog expert at the University?"

"No," I said after a while. "Smog isn't common in the midwest, because it needs fog and there isn't fog out here very often. If this was the west coast, maybe I'd say yes."

"Then who is he?"

"Wait a minute, Naomi. You're not thinking of mad scientists or anything like that?"

"No, but—"

I smiled. "Been reading too much science fiction?"

"No, Walter. Really. There's something funny—"

Her voice trailed off as Dr. Argalion returned with a large tray. "I found a whole roast chicken," he said, "with all the trimmings. It's cold, but it's a hot night anyway."

He set the food down on the table and we began to eat. I could see Naomi's heart was

not in it, the way she nibbled at her food.

Halfway through the dinner, Dr. Argalion suddenly said, "By the way, I meant to ask you. Have you seen Lenny?"

"Lenny?" Naomi and I said together.

"Yes, Lenny."

"I don't know any Lenny," Naomi said.

"Dear me, I should have realized. It's just that I've been looking all over for Lenny. He's been missing six weeks now."

"Missing?" I said,

"My nephew, Lenny. He's really a nice boy."

"Sure," I said.

"You see, he's a—well, a juvenile delinquent. His parents thought that a few weeks with me at the laboratory might give him some interest in life besides pulling the wings off flies—so to speak."

"How old is Lenny?" I wanted to know.

"Oh, I didn't actually mean pulling the wings off flies. Just a figure of speech. He's nineteen."

"Some juvenile delinquent," Naomi said.

Dr. Argalion shook his head and sighed. "I never should have let Lenny go near the stasis generator," he confessed.

I lit a cigarette. "The which?"

"You don't think this just—happened?" He waved his arms around to take in the motionless diners and all of Center City outside.

I looked at Naomi, who was staring at Dr. Argalion. I said, "Suppose you tell us."

Instead, he said: "You wouldn't think I spent twenty years on a machine I never intended to use at all. Would you?"

"Well," I said.

"Come now, Walter. You don't think this is natural smog? In Ohio?"

"It isn't?"

"Lenny did it."

Now Naomi was looking at me. "Lenny," we both said.

"I feel something like the man," Dr. Argalion admitted, "who will one day invent a bomb capable of blowing the Earth to pieces. Naturally, since he can't experiment to find out if it really will, he will have to suppose the bomb is capable of doing what he thinks."

Naomi said, "He wouldn't win any Nobel Prize."

"I couldn't actually test the stasis generator, which freezes all life in a radius of a few square miles. Naturally, I also developed a forcefield which would serve as a control for

the experiment I never would perform. But Lenny was uninhibited."

Naomi and I didn't say anything.

"Lenny stole the stasis generator. That was six weeks ago. I was able to trace the artificial smog to its center of origin, and—"

"You mean Center City?" I asked.

"Yes, Lenny is here somewhere, with the stasis generator. If I know Lenny, he's probably having all kinds of orgies. You see, he's a juvenile delinquent."

"You already said that," I pointed out.

"But I have to find him. The stasis field doesn't just go away, you see. It lasts."

"How long?" I asked, not that I really believed Dr. Argalion.

"For fourteen thousand years," he said promptly.

Naomi and I exchanged glances. Fourteen thousand years was a couple of dozen forevers. Naturally, though, our Dr. Argalion was—more than a little—nuts.

"Well?" he demanded cheerfully. "Shall we return to the hotel? We'd never be able to find Lenny in the dark."

"No?" I said.

"You see, he's afraid of the dark. He's probably hiding."

"Hiding," I said.

We went outside. For some reason I felt self-conscious and left a tip on the table.

As we hit the street, a car went whizzing by, its horn blaring steadily. It bounced off the fenders of a couple of parked cars, including Dr. Argalion's, and kept going.

"That was Lenny," Dr. Argalion said. "He never was a very good driver."

Dr. Argalion was waiting for us in the hotel lobby in the morning. He had an enormous blueprint, or what looked like an enormous blueprint, rolled up under one arm. "This is a map of Center City," he said, kneeling down on the carpeted floor and unrolling it. I looked over his shoulder. It was a map.

"I have marked off several places where we might expect to find Lenny. Points of interest, you might say, which would attract him."

Naomi and I squatted on the floor behind Dr. Argalion, looking at his map. We had discussed this business last night and decided that, since there was nothing else we could do, we might as well humor him.

"Such as what points of interest?" I said.

The index finger of Dr. Ar-

galion's right hand crawled over the map. "The Armory," he said. "Lenny's always been fascinated by firearms."

"Oh, great," I said.

He ignored me, his index finger crawling to another red X on the map. "The burlesque. Lenny just loves to look at women."

"I thought burlesque was illegal here," I said.

"It is. I suppose they pay off the police. But it doesn't matter now."

"Where else?" Naomi asked. I didn't like the look on her face. She probably remembered what had happened yesterday in her shower and didn't want to talk about burlesques and things.

"The zoo," Dr. Argalion said. "My nephew Lenny loves to tease animals. I would say that Lenny would divide his time every day among those places. All we have to do is find the right place at the right time."

"We could separate," I suggested.

"Oh, no!" Naomi cried. "I'll stick with you, Walter."

Dr. Argalion rolled up his map. "We'll all go together," he said. "Where would you like to try first?"

Naomi gave a small shudder. "Let's get the burlesque over with," she said, and the

three of us went outside into the warm morning sunshine and piled into Dr. Argalion's car. We stopped for breakfast and reached the Gayity Theater on Market Street at ten thirty. A cardboard clock above the ticket-taker's booth said the evening show started at eight-thirty, but Dr. Argalion pointed out that the stasis had taken effect a little before six. "Unfortunately for him," he said, "Lenny caught them between shows."

We went in through a lobby bedecked with full color pictures of the performers. There were Bubbles Berson, a very improbable creature with a bosom which rendered her name plausible; Mae Penny who, Naomi decided, did not look too bright; and Leggy Lacy who was built something like the wife of a daddy-long-legs spider.

Inside, it was dark. The orchestra was empty, but someone had turned on the stage lights. Naomi squealed: "I thought you said the show wasn't in progress!"

Because the stage was not empty. It contained three eye-appealing statues of women: Bubbles Berson, Mae Penny and Leggy Lacy. They had been arranged artfully, I thought. Mae was dressed up

to the neck, Leggy wore what you would expect a girl to wear on a broad-minded beach on a hot day and Bubbles wore nothing.

"It wasn't," said Dr. Argalion, who ignored the three female statues on stage and peered around the dark, dusty orchestra for Lenny. "My nephew probably carried them out there. You will notice how Miss Penny seems to be sitting, as if making up her face before a mirror. Sitting on air, of course, with her feet touching the ground." He raised his voice abruptly. "Lenny! Oh you, Len-ny!"

We approached the stage, Naomi clinging to my arm and watching me watch Mae, Leggy and Bubbles. "So," she hissed triumphantly, "when you came into my shower you really were interested in—"

"Naomi," I said.

We reached the stage. Lenny, if Lenny existed, didn't seem to be anywhere. But suddenly there was a dragging sound from the wings and Dr. Argalion raised a finger to his lips for silence. I gawked. It was Lenny, all right. Or—at least—a boy of about nineteen. He was dragging something out from the wings. He hadn't heard us. He was dragging someone. She looked like Bubbles' understudy. A device

which looked like a Geiger counter dangled by means of a strap from Lenny's left shoulder.

"The stasis generator," Dr. Argalion whispered, tugging at my sleeve. "Scare him," he went on. "I'll go around to the stage entrance, where he's sure to come out." And Dr. Argalion hurried up the aisle and soon disappeared outside.

I felt foolish. I looked at Naomi, who shrugged. I called softly, "Lenny." He didn't hear me. I called louder: "Lenny!"

He turned around and looked at me. He dropped Bubbles' understudy and started to run, the stasis generator banging against his hip. Bubbles' understudy hit the stage with a thud. I hit the stage steps on the double, heading for the wing. Naomi was right behind me.

"Walter—" she began uncertainly.

I half-turned around. I tripped over the sprawled form of Bubbles' understudy. I went down on top of her and Naomi tripped over me. We got up, Naomi's face set in an angry frown. "You didn't have to do that," she said. Bubbles' understudy, naturally, just lay there.

I shrugged and ran into the wing. There were two other

understudies who had been dragged out of their dressing rooms by Lenny. They were piled up like sacks of sand, waiting their turn to be taken out before the footlights. I ran past them and collided with the statue of a pipe-smoking stage doorman at the stage door exit. I fell down again. This time Naomi didn't trip over me.

She waited with hands on hips until I got up. We went outside slowly. There was no need to hurry now. Dr. Argalion was there, sitting on the sidewalk and massaging his jaw.

"Lenny got away," he said. He seemed dazed. "He hit me with the stasis generator."

"Which way?" I said, looking up and down the street. I was almost beginning to believe Dr. Argalion.

"You can relax, young man. He took his car."

Naomi, who had more presence of mind than I did at the moment, helped Dr. Argalion to his feet. I lit a cigarette and waited. "Did you get a good look at Bubbles?" Dr. Argalion asked with a kind of detached enthusiasm. "She certainly had the most improbable—"

"That's enough!" Naomi screamed. "You men!"

"I assure you—" Dr. Argalion began.

But I interrupted him. "Armory or zoo, which is next?"

"I don't know. Somehow it seems a little early for the zoo. Lenny liked to tease my cat in the afternoon, as I remember." He rambled on for a while about his cat. I lit another cigarette with the stub of the first.

Just then we heard a loud booming sound. It was unmistakably the sound of a heavy artillery piece being fired.

"The armory," Dr. Argalion said. "I knew it."

We piled into his car again, unrolled the map and consulted it. The armory was on Sixteenth Street, about a mile from the Gayity Theater. Dr. Argalion seemed bemused. Probably, he was thinking of Bubbles and her improbable something. I did the driving.

Along the way, we heard the sound of artillery fire three more times. I wondered what Lenny was shooting at. I didn't want to think about it. The people in Center City were statues now, but if Dr. Argalion knew what he was talking about they would return to life if we could get hold of Lenny's stasis generator. Unless Lenny demolished

some of them, buildings and all, with his heavy artillery.

The armory was a big red-stone building taking up a whole city block. It looked strangely like some transplanted medieval fortress, gloomy and foreboding. A thin wisp of smoke was rising distantly from its very center. The enormous gate, big enough to drive a couple of moving vans through side by side, was opened. It resembled the portculliss of an ancient castle.

We parked the car. "If he sees us coming and fires," Dr. Argalion said, "we're liable to—"

"Some juvenile delinquent," Naomi said.

We held a brief council of war and decided upon a pretty pale means of attack. We would remain outside the armory and blow the horn of Dr. Argalion's car. The least we could hope for was to distract Lenny from his artillery practice. Unless, I thought grimly, he decided to lob a few mortar shells down on us from some point of vantage over the wall.

It was Naomi who leaned on the horn. Dr. Argalion and I got out of the car and waited on either side of it. We had already noticed Lenny's car parked nearby and figured

he'd have to reach it on foot. This seemed our chance to get him. But I almost expected him to come out of there with a tommy-gun bucking in his arms like Machine-gun Kelly.

We waited five minutes, while Naomi tooted the horn. Ten minutes. I smoked two cigarettes and began to feel uneasy. It was too quiet in there. We had stopped his firing, all right, but what was Lenny doing now?

Suddenly, I heard a rumbling sound. It was far away at first, but it came closer. It was like a whole fleet of trucks on rolling display behind the redstone wall of the armory.

"Division parade?" I said sarcastically. Dr. Argalion didn't think it was funny. He stared with expectancy on his face at the yawning gateway. And Lenny came out.

In a big rumbling Sherman tank, its treads chewing up the summer-softened asphalt.

The tank bore down on us, treads clanking. The turret swung toward us, the snout of its big gun pointing down on our throats.

"Lenny!" Dr. Argalion shouted.

The turret swung up and away. The tank shuddered as the mobile artillery piece was fired harmlessly into the air. Then the tank rumbled on

past our car and down the street. Lenny wouldn't need his battered car anymore.

We climbed back in Dr. Argalion's sedan alongside Naomi. All of us were a little breathless. I believed Argalion now. It didn't make any sense at all not believing him.

"There's something I forgot to tell you about Lenny and the stasis generator," he said. "You see—"

"Save it," I told him, as Naomi started the car. Lenny was clearly a menace. Not merely to Center City, whose inhabitants he had turned to statues, but to us as well. If he stayed inside that tank, there was no telling what he might do. Fortunately, his uncle's guesses had been right so far. Dr. Argalion sure knew his nephew. As a consequence, I didn't think Lenny would stay inside the tank very long.

"The zoo?" Naomi said.

We both nodded at her, Dr. Argalion giving her directions from his map.

"The zoo," I said grimly.

It was in a small park on the outskirts of Center City, as far as we could go without hitting the forcefield, which seemed to go along with Dr. Argalion's smog-brought stasis. We drove into the green park, its narrow two-lane

roads crowded with unmoving summer traffic which had been stalled since yesterday afternoon. We cut across the greensward, following the signs on the pedestrian walks to the zoo.

Lenny's tank was parked near the tiger cage. The tiger, an enormous orange and white striped beast which seemed to be sunning itself perpetually and which must have been over ten feet long, measured over curves as tigers are measured by people who care about tigers and tigerskin trophies. It had been sunning itself like that, I knew, since yesterday afternoon, when, like every other living thing which had been in Center City for any length of time, it had been turned into a statue.

Lenny was also in the cage.

Lenny wasn't sunning himself. I winced even though I knew the tiger couldn't do a thing about it. Lenny had braced himself against the bars on the inside and, with both arms straining, was pulling the tiger's tail.

"Lenny!" Dr. Argalion called.

"Come out," I said.

Lenny said, "I will not."

But he was trapped in there. He had gotten the keeper's keys to open the cage gate

and now was inside. "We can lock him in," Naomi suggested.

"But who will shut off the stasis?" Dr. Argalion asked her.

I grinned. "The tiger can't help himself just now. I'll go in after Lenny."

"He may be armed," Dr. Argalion pointed out. "He was in the armory."

"Don't I know it," I said, not entering the cage. "But someone has to." I looked at Lenny. He seemed normal enough, a nineteen-year-old boy with a pleasant face and an unruly mop of blond hair. Dr. Argalion said he was a juvenile delinquent. He wasn't, though. He was just plain nuts from the look on his face as he pulled the tiger's tail.

"Damn it," he said all at once. "It won't pull. It's stuck."

"Of course it's stuck, Lenny," Dr. Argalion said in a soothing voice. "It's stuck because you have the stasis on. Why don't you turn the stasis off? You just push the button on the left side of the generator, and—"

"Oh, no," Lenny smiled at him. "You can't kid me. I'm having too much fun this way."

Fun—while all of Center City slept. I walked toward

the gate. Naomi said, "I really wasn't angry at you before, Walter. Please be careful."

"Poor Lenny," Dr. Argalion said. He sounded very sad.

"Poor Lenny?" Naomi asked him as I reached the cage. "But he—"

"You'll see, my dear Miss Winters. You'll see."

I stood at the barred gate, which was partially ajar. "Are you coming out?" I said. "Or do I have to go in after you?"

Lenny stuck out his tongue, still trying to pull the tiger's rock-hard tail. I took a deep breath and went inside the cage.

After that, things happened swiftly. Lenny let go of the tiger's tail and came running toward me. He was groping in his pocket for something and I wanted to reach him before he pulled out the something—which I suspected would be a gun. He got it clear of his pocket just as I reached him and I was right. He held a big black service .45 in his hand, pointing it at me.

"Don't come any closer," he said. The tiger didn't move, of course. But somehow, I was more afraid of the tiger than I was of Lenny. I had never been inside a tiger cage complete with tiger before, and I

never hope to be again. The tiger wasn't moving, but I could smell it.

I hit the gun from Lenny's hand with the side of my own right hand. The gun clattered away, bouncing off the tiger's ribs and onto the floor of the cage. Lenny dove for it, the generator dangling at his side. I dove after Lenny, who got the gun again. Naomi screamed. Dr. Argalion shouted something, but I didn't hear the words. Now I was paying no attention to the gun, I had come into the cage to do one thing and I was going to do it. I grasped the stasis generator and pushed the proper button. There was a crowd of statues outside the cage, who had been here since yesterday. From the corner of my eye, I could see them start to move, finishing interrupted steps, bringing long-dead matches to unlit cigarettes, finishing sentences they had started almost twenty-four hours ago. Then several of them started screaming. It was great seeing them come back to life like that—but the screams were definitely not great. Naomi was screaming, too. All the screams told me what I had forgotten.

I had forgotten all about the tiger.

Sitting on its haunches,

awake now, its tail straight out behind it, a snarl issuing from its great throat, it prepared to leap at me. I lunged aside as it sprung and the tiger came up sharply, growling now, against the bars. The bars shook.

"Let's get out of here!" I yelled at Lenny.

Lenny didn't answer. I looked at Lenny. He was sitting on the floor of the cage with the service .45. He wasn't moving. He was a statue.

The tiger wheeled around and looked at Lenny and me with its red-flecked eyes. It seemed to be a very intelligent-looking tiger. And hungry. It leaped. Not at me: at poor Lenny.

It hit Lenny and knocked him over, the great jaws fastening on his shoulder. Naomi, outside the cage, looked away. But the tiger roared hideously and bounded away from Lenny. It leaped to the far side of the cage, spitting out broken teeth. They were large teeth and very yellow and stronger than yours or mine. But they had tried to take a bite out of Lenny—who now was as hard as stone.

I went to Lenny and hefted his dead weight to my shoulder. The tiger was whining and looking at us with eyes that said we had played un-

fair. I took Lenny outside the cage and deposited him in the back seat of Dr. Argalion's car. A big crowd gathered around us. They didn't seem to know a full day had passed since last they had been among the living. The outside world would tell them, of course, but I wondered if Center City's citizens would ever believe that the lost day had been a reality for the rest of earth.

We drove away before the park police could start asking questions. I looked in the rear-view mirror. Lenny was still a statue.

"That's what I wanted to tell you," Dr. Argalion said. "When you turned on the rest of Center City, you turned off Lenny."

"Oh," I said. Then "Oh?"

"Yes, I'm afraid it's permanent. You see, if I ever use the generator to turn Lenny on again, it will turn off an area wherever we happen to be about the size of Center City."

He was absent-minded, all right. I wanted to suggest he take Lenny out into the wilderness somewhere and do it, but I didn't. He'd think of it in time. The northwoods somewhere. Where he and Lenny would be all alone.

He smiled. "I know what

you're thinking. But someone has to turn the machine off, or rather, on again. Besides, there would be the forcefield. He would be trapped inside the forcefield. If he shut it to get out, Lenny would freeze again. It seems Lenny will remain a statue."

It was a bleak fate for anyone but if anyone deserved it, Lenny was the boy. Besides, I'd take Dr. Argalion's address and write him in a month or two about an automatic mechanism to turn off the machine for Lenny. Naturally, they'd have to stock the area with plenty of canned food—enough to last poor Lenny a lifetime. But at least he would come to life again. Meanwhile, a couple of months as a statue seemed fitting.

"Glad it's over?" I asked Naomi as Dr. Argalion drove us to the hotel.

"Oh, yes. There were just too many temptations."

"Will you take that job here you were talking about?"

"Oh, no. I couldn't stand to stay in Center City."

"I'm leaving too," I said.

"That's nice."

"Want to leave together?"

"Of course, Walter."

I looked at her. I kissed her. "I'm glad Lenny stole the machine," we both said together.

THE END

THE REVOLVING FAN



AS THIS is being written (end of September, '55), the convention season has come and gone, leaving behind it some memories both happy and unhappy, some new owners of books, treasured back issues of the s-f magazines, and illustrations, much transfer of information about the field, and some new friends and enemies. . . .

Thus passes into Limbo the Agacon, the Oklacon, the Mid-westcon, the Westercon, and of course the Clevention. I shall enjoy reading the fans' reactions to these gatherings, but I beg fanzine editors to use discretion in choosing how many issues to devote to ruminations, memories, and reports. Satiation is stupefaction . . . even in science fiction.

* * *

INSIDE AND S-F ADVERTISER, #11: Sept., '55. Ron Smith, 611 West 114th St., Apt. 3d-310, New York 25, N. Y. 5/\$1. 60 pp.

This issue is one of the best which I've seen in some time. INSIDE not only looks good; it reads even better than it looks. Leadoff article, "Dandruff in the Fright-Wig," is by Robert Bloch. Illustrated by stills from some of the s-f and horror movies of the past, it gives the author's definition of what constitutes the true examples of the genre, and an evaluation of the good and the bad in the field. Fine stuff, and Mr. Bloch is to be congratulated on an article which undoubtedly took much research as well as cerebration.

Next, a discussion between four people not unknown to you fans and readers—Sam Moskowitz, Robert Lowndes, Larry Shaw, and H. L. Gold. Subject of the discussion: an attack by Mr. Moskowitz on "The Strange Business Attitude of the Science Fiction Industry." Rebuttals are by the other three writer-editors mentioned, with a final Postscript by Moskowitz. In essence, the stormy petrel of s-f blames The Slump on s-f's lack of business acumen and tactics. Opponents point out that s-f depends on imponderables not to be found in industries which sell tangibles and services. It seemed to me that Lowndes, Shaw, and Gold had the real last word, in spite of the P.S. by Moskowitz. But then, in an argument with Sam Moskowitz, who doesn't?

Next item, holding the high interest to be found in everything contained in this splendid issue, is "The Angrian Saga," by Lin Carter, which gives an account of the fantasies written by the Bronte family. That's right—the famous Emily, Charlotte, Anne, and brother Branwell. It seems that, as children, the Brontes invented an imaginary world called "Angria," and wrote some fifty books about the empire, its people, and its heroes.

A Think piece follows, kicked-off by the editor, with assists by Ray Schaffer, Jr., Des Emery, Edward Wood, and Mark Clifton. "Brave New Writing," by Dave Foley, devotes itself to demolishing the pretensions of the *avante garde* with some effective satire. Rib-tickling, subtly savage, the examples show up the inanity of the poseurs, sciolists, and pseudo-aesthetes. Lin Carter's lengthy department "Inside Books," reviews the newest fiction and non-fiction with taste and judgment. Though high-priced by the standards of the field, INSIDE is worth every cent.

* * *

GRUE. #24: Summer, '55. Dean A Grennell, 402 Maple Ave., Fond Du Lac, Wis. 1/2¢ per page to the nearest 5¢. Send 25¢ in advance. Usually 15¢ or 2/25¢. 29 pp.

GRUE leads off with John Magnus' "I Remember Opus," a nostalgic reminiscence of a 'zine which folded not long ago. With Grennell joining in, it becomes a well-deserved plaudit

for ex-editor W. Max Keasler and illustrator Ray Nelson. Forrest J. Ackerman conducts a department of thumbnail s-f book reviews, and manages to keep the nails well-buffed without becoming claws. An overseas correspondent, John Berry, undertakes an imitation of Boswell as he chronicles the career of the well-known Belfast author and fan, James White. Berry proves to be a pretty good undertaker. William Gault, writer, defends pulp authors, and the editor follows up Gault's thesis (pulp writing would more aptly be called action writing, which makes for fine reading) with a reminiscence of *Pulps I Have Known and Loved*. In "Miscellania," Douglas Graves introduces the reader to the Hand of Glory (magic) in an article which, despite its tongue-in-cheek attitude, makes interesting sense. A page of Gnurrsery Rhymes by various poets (most of whom, it is whispered, are DAG) adds a light touch to the proceedings, and in "The Fickle Finger Writes," the editor evaluates GRUE's issue #23. Last piece is Walter Spiegls' informative "Report on Science Fiction in Germany."

* * *

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW, #21: Aug., '55. Richard E. Geis, 1525 NE Ainsworth, Portland 11, Ore. 15¢; 7/\$1. 20 pp.

Here is Mr. Geis' long-heralded replacement of PSYCHOTIC. Since receiving this copy, I've read in FANDOM-DISPATCH (see below) that Mr. Geis has decided to go back to PSY, a decision which I applaud. Somehow, this fanzine doesn't have its predecessor's bite and variety, but is composed of discreet items, like a meal in which every course bears no relationship to any other. Damon Knight's leadoff article, "The Dollar and the Dream," is a discussion of the field's fluctuations by one of s-f's most perceptive critics, writers, and editors, and makes a fine appetizer. The soup course, "Mary Had a Little Lamb," demonstrates that Curtis Janke knows how to make an alphabet consomme which, although tasty, is somewhat watery. Noah W. McLeod's relish tray, in his book review section, "The Top Shelf," contains an ill-assorted mixture of sweet and bitter. The entrees, editor Geis' "Dialogue," takes a fowl view of STARTLING, described by the chef as a turkey, and dissected so microtomically that its thin slices have little savor. Desserts

come in two kinds, the custard of Harlan Ellison's "Letter from New York," and the plum pudding of Fred L. Smith's "Letter from Britain." The latter would have been the better for a dash of brandy. Jim Harmon's review of William Tenn's "Of All Possible Worlds" is the coffee, an acrid brew served without sweetening or cream. Nuts and fruits, of course, in the letter section. . . .

Waiter—the bicarbonate, please!

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES, Vol. X; Numbers 222-233, May-Oct., '55, Fandom House, P.O. Box #2331, Paterson 23, N. J. 10¢; 12/\$1.4 to 8 pp.

What do you say about the New York Times, the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature? Each is tops in its field. So is FANTASY-TIMES. It contains information, evaluation, and news found nowhere else in science fiction. If you're starting a 'zine file, always begin with this one. Unassuming, up-to-the-minute (I got my first report about the Clevention from issue #232, First October), detailed, and as exact as the two editors can make it, FANTASY-TIMES is in its 15th year of publication. When our spacemen reach the Moon, one of them will probably carry with him a copy which describes the trip.

* * *

OOPSLA! #18. Greg Calkins, 2817 Eleventh Street, Santa Monica, Calif. 15¢; 2/25¢, 28 pp.

Starting with the editor's reminiscences of conventions he has known, OOPS presents a reprint from SLANT by Bob Shaw, "The Fansmanship Lectures," which is as uproariously risible as any I've read in the 'zines. Bob Silverberg reviews the fanzines with competence, and John Berry, like Shaw a member of the United Kingdom, writes an amusing account of his experiences with his robot budgerigar. Proving that this issue is a "Hands Across the Sea" number, Walt Willis' "The Harp That Once or Twice" continues the adventures of the Northern Irishman in the United States, particularly as re-

gards his meetings with Hugo Gernsback (Willis doesn't like him) and Ray Bradbury (Willis does). An Index to 18 issues of OOPS and a department of letters and musings end this effort, in which I miss the Calkins touch.

* * *

FANDOM DISPATCH. Vol. I, #2. David Rike, Box 203, Rodeo, Calif. No price listed. 4 pp.

DISPATCH tries to do for fandom what F-T (see above) does for the field as a whole. By and large, it succeeds. It was from this issue that I learned of PSYCHOTIC's return, that a s-f spectacular would be on TV Oct. 16 (The World of 1976), and that Greg Calkins plans a fan directory. The 'zine should prove to be valuable and interesting to all fans, but needs a better reproduction job and makeup, which, should you fen subscribe in sufficient numbers, should not be long in forthcoming.

* * *

TYPO. #3: July, '55. Walt Bowart, 306 E. Hickory, Enid, Okla. 15¢; 60¢ per year. 30 pp.

Profusely illustrated, TYPO contains a good article by Chester S. Geier on "How to Write S-F." Which is somewhat oversimplified, but valuable, nonetheless. A competent 'zine review column, a report on the Oklacon III held in Tulsa, Alan Dodd's dodderings, and part of a story by Ron Ellik fill the rest of an issue which is mostly devoted to a so-called satire, Kent Corey's "Alice in Fanland." The initiate or profan will find much to chuckle over, but most references will be too obscure for the average reader. Possessed of so much gusto that it sprawls shapelessly all over the map, TYPO needs a compass to point out direction.

* * *

That's all for now, so *Vaya con Dios*. See you in the issue-after-next.

A "JOHNNY MAYHEM"
ADVENTURE

THE BURNING MAN

By C. H. THAMES

THE Galactic Firstman of Mercury did not seem happy to see Johnny Mayhem. His name was Timothy O'Halrohan of Earth and Eire and he could look as delighted as an Irishman. Also as glum. Right now he looked glum.

"Come on in, Mayhem," he

"Your next job is to do a ninety-nine-year stretch in poky," they told Mayhem. When he pointed out that he never had more than a month to live in any one body, he got back a shrug and the same order. How could he lick the problem? Simple: suicide by sunburn!

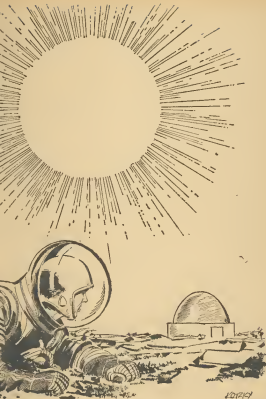
said. "You're a little early."

Mayhem shrugged. "I tried to hurry. The Hub said it was important."

"It's important," O'Halrohan agreed. "It's so damned important, I don't know where to begin. And I hate to officiate at the burial of a legend."



... the dome



must reach the dome . . . he must re—

"You mean the Mayhem legend?"

"Do yourself a favor, Mayhem, and turn the job down. Because you'll never live through it."

Mayhem said nothing. He had, in the past week and a half, grown accustomed to the Earthman body he was inhabiting. Johnny Mayhem was, of course, the famous, legendary Man Without a Body. How many corporeal shells had he inhabited in the past five years? He shrugged, not remembering. He couldn't remain in one body for more than a month: it would mean the final death which his *elan*, his bodiless sentience, had so far avoided.

The Galactic League would help him if it could. Every world that had an Earthman population and a Galactic League post, however small, must have a body in cold storage, waiting for Johnny Mayhem if his services were required. But no one knew exactly under what circumstances the Galactic League Council, operating from the Hub of the Galaxy, might summon Mayhem. And only a very few people, including those at the Hub and the Galactic League Firstmen on civilized worlds and Observers on primitive worlds, knew

the precise mechanics of Mayhem's coming.

Johnny Mayhem, bodiless sentience. Mayhem—Johnny Marlow, then—who had been chased from Earth, a pariah and a criminal, six years ago, who had been mortally wounded on a wild planet deep within the Saggitarian Swarm, whose life had been saved—after a fashion—by the white magic of the planet. Mayhem, doomed now to possible immortality as a bodiless sentience, an *elan*, which could occupy and activate a fresh corpse or one which had been frozen properly . . . an *elan* doomed to wander eternally because it could not remain in one body for more than a month without body and *elan* perishing. Mayhem, who had dedicated his strange, lonely life to the service of the Galactic League because a normal life and normal social relations were not possible for him . . .

"Then you won't turn the job down?" Timothy O'Halrohan demanded in the Firstman's office on Mercury.

"I haven't heard what the job is, yet."

"One thing puzzles me, Mayhem. I thought you usually arrived—well, you know—"

"Without a body, you mean? Usually I do. But was doing some work on Venus and had enough time so I could come here to Mercury the normal way. Now, what's the situation?"

"Sunside Penal Colony," said O'Halrohan, his big Irish face bleak. "You've heard of it?"

"Who hasn't? All over the Galaxy, Firstman. Sunside is a model penal institution because it's escape proof."

"Exactly," said the Firstman. "I don't have to tell you everything you do as Mayhem is done with unofficial approval of the Galactic League but without official sanction. So, if we sent you to Sunside Penal Colony in the body of a man condemned to life in prison, and if you only had a month to get out or die—"

"Is that the deal?"

O'Halrohan wouldn't look him in the eye. "I'm afraid so. Now will you refuse?"

"What's the trouble at the Penal Colony?" Mayhem asked.

"Mayhem, we don't know! Suddenly, the cons seem to like it there. Suddenly, criminals are practically fighting to get in. When something like that happens at the Solar System's most feared pris-

on, the Hub wants to know why. I guess they figure if anyone can find out for them, you can."

Mayhem stood up and went to the two-foot thick quartzite window. The planet Mercury, closest to the sun, had a dark side and a light side and a wobble which produced an unpredictable twilight zone. The compound of the Galactic Firstman had now wobbled out of the twilight zone entirely and was in the glare of Mercury's sunside, thirty-six million miles from the primary. What Mayhem saw was a nightmare landscape: twisted, convoluted, parched, fiery red rock without a sign of life on it. Far away toward the horizon, something gleamed through the deeply tinted quartzite. Mayhem thought it was a lake of molten lead. He said, finally:

"If the Galactic League is that curious, so am I. I'll go."

"Just like that?"

"I guess so." What Mayhem did not say was that he sought adventure on behalf of the Galactic League not only because he wanted to help but because sometimes he courted death like a lover who could not make up his mind. Wasn't his life a constant flirtation with death?

Had he ever refused a job merely because it seemed too dangerous? He smiled and said, "What are the details?"

"We have a body in cold storage, but you're not going to use it. A lifer named Bartholomew Tobay arrived on Mercury yesterday but took cyanide before we could process him for Sunside Penal. We've kept it secret because we want you to use Tobay's body. I'll be frank, Mayhem: we can make no exceptions in your case. A man who enters Sunside enters for life. Upon the completion of your mission, assuming you complete it, we won't be able to rescue you. If you can't escape on your own, I am afraid you will die in Sunside in thirty days."

"I understand that."

"But you don't understand how certain we are you won't escape. Sunside is escape-proof, Mayhem. It's surrounded on all sides by a thousand miles of dayside Mercury. The guards, who wear asbestos suits, are rotated to civilization not from the Penal Colony but from a base half a dozen miles away. The guards are there only to keep order, because no one can escape."

"You already said that," Mayhem smiled.

"Damn it, man, I want to

give you a chance to back down. I was hoping you'd back down. Galactic League is so sure you won't get out to tell us what you find, they've imbedded a tiny radio unit in Tobay's inner ear so you can make your report. Now will you change your mind?"

"No."

"Well, I tried to warn you. Have you any questions?"

"None."

"Well, the penal jet leaves in a couple of hours. That doesn't give us much time. It gives you very little time, Mayhem. Are you ready?"

Mayhem nodded.

With a resigned shrug, O'Halrohan spoke into a desk speaker. "Prepare Tobay's body for project M," he said.

"Tobay!" a voice shouted.

Mayhem trugged forward in his new body, still not accustomed to its motor-reactions. That was a part of the Mayhem legend few people knew, he thought. For the first few hours it was almost like learning to walk all over again. "Tobay here," Mayhem said with his new voice. It was a deep voice from a deep-chested man. Bart Tobay was a big, thickly-muscled man not too many years out of the prime of life. At least on that

score, Mayhem had no objections.

"Get in line with the others," the guard said, "Unless you want a special invitation."

"Not me," Mayhem told him, shuffling into line awkwardly. There were half a dozen lifers making the trip from Galactic Compound in Mercury's twilight zone to Sunside Penal Colony. It was, Mayhem told himself for the tenth time, a one-way trip. Maybe . . .

The six criminals filed within the rocket, were strapped into bucket chairs along one side wall by an indifferent guard. Jets whined and roared outside, then became muted and distant as the pressure door was sealed. Mayhem felt himself thrust sideways in the bucket seat as the penal jet took off.

"Unfasten belts!" a mechanical voice said a few moments later. Through the deeply tinted windows Mayhem could make out the fiery Mercurean landscape, the jagged, unweathered rocks, the naked, uneroded mountainpeaks, the sluggish molten lakes . . .

"Some sight, huh?" a voice at Mayhem's elbow said.

He looked around. It was a half-caste Martian-Earthman

who had spoken, a small swart fellow with the enormous chest and spindly limbs of a Martian and the facial features of an Earthman. "Pitapin's the name," the breed said, grinning. "The Martian government figured it was time I took a vacation. A permanent one. Well, I haven't been to Mercury before. Might as well see the Solar System, I always say." He winked at Mayhem.

"I'm Bart Tobay," Mayhem introduced himself.

"Tobay? Say, I heard of you." Pitapin stretched his sinewy arms and said in a confidential tone, "A smart operator like you, was it your own idea?"

"Was what my own idea?"

"Come on, Tobay. We're going to see a lot of each other. We're going to be pals. You can tell me if you let yourself be caught just so you could get to Sunside Penal."

"What man in his right mind would want to do a thing like that? It's a one-way trip. Isn't it?"

"All right. All right, if you don't want to talk, I'll climb off your back. But I hope you change your mind. If you do, Pitapin's all ears."

Mayhem remembered what the Galactic Firstman had told him. Criminals practice-

ally forming lines to get into Sunside . . . Pitapin seemed to know something about it—at least seemed to know there was a reason for it and guessed a criminal of Bart Tobay's reputation might know what that reason was. Mayhem said, "After all, Pitapin, I hardly know you at all."

"Ah! That's better." The breed's eyes took on a crafty look. "You'll have plenty of time to know me. I just want to get in on the inside track, that's all. I said we're going to be pals, didn't I?"

Mayhem nodded.

"Hell," Pitapin went on, "we've got all the time in the world."

I don't know about you, Mayhem thought. *But I've got exactly one month. To find out and escape—or die.*

"These are your asbesuits," the guard said at the station six miles from Penal Sunside. "In the old days the suits were asbestos and the name stuck. Actually, the insulating material is a liquid today. And I want to tell you about these suits so you don't get any ideas. They can take you as far as Sunside with a small margin for error, but no further. In other words, you can't escape in them. To

try means death. Well, let's go."

The six convicts obediently climbed into their bulky asbesuits and plodded through the airlock of the small station dome. Mayhem's visor was a mere slit with a tinted quartzite cover, but even so the fierce Mercurian sun hurt his eyes. The ground was unexpectedly hard underfoot. For some reason, Mayhem had expected soft pumice, as on the moon. The landscape was almost entirely white and impossibly jagged, twisted, convoluted. The surface had been thrust up from the bowels of Mercury perhaps a billion years ago, Mayhem knew, and had puckered upon contact with the vacuum of space. Since Mercury had no atmosphere, no weathering action had softened the naked, lifeless landscape.

Mayhem watched Pitapin's bulky suited figure marching along ahead of him, watched the two guards, electron rifles drawn and ready although the gesture was utterly unnecessary, turned and saw the other four convicts trailing in single file. Did any of them know the secret of Sunside Penal? Mayhem wondered. He thought he could find out, but didn't know if he could bring the informa-

tion back to civilization with him. There was always the tiny radio imbedded in his ear. It would answer Galactic League's problem, but it wouldn't help Mayhem . . .

Hours later, they trudged into the domed compound of Sunside Penal. The tinted dome reflected back enough of the sun's rays, Mayhem observed when he removed his asbestos, so you wouldn't have to squint perpetually, but the glare was still more than annoying and the oppressive heat a weight which sapped your strength.

Mayhem and Pitapin were sent with hedding and fatigue clothing to a small harracka-like building in a row of identical buildings under the low southern edge of the dome. It was dim inside and comparatively cool, but Mayhem wasn't fooled. He had seen the fatigue-clad figures working in the dusty streets of the Penal Colony and knew that most of his waking hours would be spent the same way.

"Hey, you two!" a voice cried. "Get the hell over here and report."

Mayhem and Pitapin deposited their gear on two empty hunks near the end of the long room and turned toward the sound of the voice. Mayhem had always won-

dered what sort of individuals would become guards at a place like Sunside Penal. If the man he now saw was the rule rather than the exception, the answer was a grim one. He was a tall, beefy man, bare to the waist, the hard layer of muscle on his body covered with one of fat. He had a small bald head but a large face with cruel brutal features. He had the thickest neck Mayhem had ever seen. His face was stamped with the harsh, scowling lines of the cynic and the outcast—and something else which Mayhem couldn't quite name until his muscular right arm swung up and then heavily down with what looked like a metal hockey stick. The stick caught Pitapin across the back and sent him sprawling.

Instinctively, Mayhem closed with the guard before he could use his weapon again. Mayhem got both hands on the haft of the club and tore it from the man's grasp.

"That's enough," Mayhem said softly. "He didn't do anything to deserve that."

The other look on the guard's face faded before frustration. His hands clenched and unclenched. *He doesn't*

belong here, Mayhem thought. *He's sick. He belongs in a mental hospital.* Because the look on the man's face—which he had not been able to place—was the expression of a sadist. That, then, was one kind of man who would volunteer for this work, Mayhem now knew. A sadist, who enjoyed seeing other people suffer, who enjoyed making them suffer.

"Give it to me!" the man bellowed at Mayhem as Pitapin got up. "Give me the club."

"Calm down," Mayhem suggested.

"I'll call the captain."

"Go ahead and call him."

"What did you say?"

"Call him if you want. I don't know if what you just did is Sunside policy or not, but remember this: you can't look everywhere at once. Sooner or later you're going to turn your back. Aren't you?"

Pitapin rubbed his shoulder and smiled at Mayhem. "Thank you, Tobay," he said. "I won't forget this."

The guard said, "Well, if that ain't something. Thieves' honor, eh? O.K., con, you can give me the club now."

"If you remember what I said. If you lay off."

The guard held his hand

out without replying. Mayhem looked at Pitapin, who nodded slowly. Mayhem handed the club over. Brandishing it, the guard laughed. "I bet you thought I'd use it," he said.

Mayhem shrugged.

"Well, listen, con. There are other ways. There are ways here at Sunside you ain't dreamed of, to make a man suffer. And I know them all. I'm not going to forget you."

"I'll bet you do know them all at that," Mayhem said.

"Is that supposed to be funny? Well, never mind. Here, cona," he said, handing them two creased paper forms. "Fill these out with the pencil hanging on the wall. My name's Walker, by the way."

He seemed almost friendly now, Mayhem observed. He might be as humane as the next fellow when the sadism didn't grip him. But, Mayhem thought, he would be as unpredictable as Mercury's wobbling twilight zone.

"Get this straight," Walker said. "I ain't a guard."

"Are you kidding?" Pitapin said.

"I'm cadre, stupid. I'm a con, just like you. It's the nearest thing to a trustee they have here. A cadre knows a good thing when he's

got it, see? He wants to keep it. So, he takes his job more seriously than a guard. He knows what it's like to obey orders because he has to obey them himself. He expects you to obey him instantly. And don't forget this, cons; he's a con, too. He knows all your tricks. He's wise to anything you try because he tried it years before you even thought of it."

Mayhem listened to the words Walker spoke, words out of some manual the cadreman had learned by rote. When Walker stopped talking, Mayhem turned and headed back toward his bunk. He threw himself quickly aside when Pitapin bellowed a warning, but even so Walker's club caught him numbingly across the shoulder. He staggered, breathing deeply while a wave of nausea receded. He stood in his tracks and did not turn around. He thought if he turned around Walker would use the club again.

"I didn't dismiss you," Walker said. "You don't take a step around here until you're told. You see?"

"Yes," Mayhem said through clenched teeth. Mayhem heard Walker rustling the forms they had filled out.

"So you're Tobay," Walker said. "Be smart, Tobay. Be good to yourself. I hold all the trumps here in this barracks. Turn around," he ordered abruptly. Mayhem turned around. "I ain't such a bad guy if you get to know me. If you play it right. Listen to me, Tobay. And you, Pitapin. I hold trumps you ain't even dreamed of. Maybe you got some little idea of what I mean."

"The reason everybody wants to—" Pitapin began, his voice a fierce whisper. But he didn't finish the thought, for Walker rapped the stick deftly across his face, splitting lips and loosening teeth.

"I didn't ask for your opinion," Walker said. "Get over to your bunks now, both of you. You have twenty minutes to make them up proper and change into your fatigue clothing. It's still a long afternoon, men, plenty of time to work. Now, move!"

Pitapin looked at Mayhem. Pitapin didn't say anything, but was busy nursing his badly bruised lips with the sleeve of his fatigue jacket. But Pitapin's eyes said plenty: Pitapin's eyes said: *one wrong move is all he has to make. One wrong move.*

An hour later, they were

digging a foundation for a new barracks with a gang of fellow prisoners. The artificial air inside the dome was hot and sultry. Too much carbon dioxide, Mayhem thought. His muscles felt sluggish. It saved some money on the oxygen generators but it meant less efficient work, Mayhem told himself. He smiled grimly. Why did the work have to be efficient? There was nothing pressing. They had all the time in the world. If they ran out of jobs they could do the same ones over and over again.

Pitapin and Mayhem were put on the pneumatic drilling detail, pulverizing the hard rock of Mercury's surface with diamond - sharp drill - bits. Another crew followed them, digging out the pulverized stone with shovels. A third crew carted the debris to an airlock, where a fourth took it outside.

The afternoon wore on slowly. The bucking handle of the pneumatic drill blistered Mayhem's hands. Whatever Bart Tobay had spent his life doing, it had not been hard manual labor. Eventually, a whistle summoned the work crews to the large centrally located mess hall where they were served food

rich in carbohydrates but low in fats and proteins.

Mayhem slept deep and dreamlessly that night. In the morning, it was breakfast—as much as you could eat—and more work. In the days that followed, Mayhem got to know his barracks companions. There was Regan of Earth, a wife-slayer; Koltan the Venusian kidnaper whose name had flashed briefly across the Solar System's video screens; Latrukin of Mars, who had assassinated the governor of Syrtis Major; the Earthman Thompson, grim and taciturn, who—like Cain—had slain his brother; and others whose names Mayhem did not know. And, of course, there was Pitapin, who followed Mayhem around like a faithful dog since the incident with Walker.

But none of them were big time, Mayhem learned. Only Walker, but Walker wasn't actually one of the prisoners although his sentence on Mercury, like theirs, was for life. Still, Walker had indicated he knew something. The others clearly did not. Mayhem shrugged. A week had passed since he reached Sunside. Three weeks of life remained to him—including the time it would take to leave the es-

cape-proof prison and the time it would take to enter the body which was waiting for him in cold storage. Thus far, he had learned nothing. And wouldn't—not from his barracks mates. From Walker?

It was a decided possibility, but the others would hate him if he buttered up the brutal cadreman. Still, it was why he had come to Mercury.

The next morning, he took Walker's side in a petty argument over latrine duty. Latru-kin, who bore the brunt of Walker's wrath that morning, seemed amazed. He growled something unintelligible at Mayhem and walked off. At breakfast, only Pitapin spoke to Mayhem. At lunch, it was the same. And Pitapin seemed very unhappy.

Before chow that night, Mayhem again took Walker's side in an argument. This time it concerned policing of the barracks area. "If you want to live in a pigsty—" Walker began, and Mayhem had quickly confirmed his point of view.

The result was an extra hour spent by the entire barracks cleaning up the ground surrounding it. When they were finished, all fatigued from the extra burden of

work in the oppressive heat, even loyal Pitapin didn't have a word to say to Mayhem.

But Walker did. He called Mayhem over and said, "I've been watching you lately, con. I got to admit I had you figured wrong."

"What do you mean?"

"I figured you for a wise guy. I figured you'd give me a lot of trouble. But you're all right. Yes, sir. You're the best man in there, far as I'm concerned."

Mayhem smiled. "Latru-kin, Regan and the others don't think so."

"You care what those bums think?"

"No," Mayhem said promptly.

"That's what I thought. Listen, Tobay. We cadremen got our own sweet deal cooking. The police guards don't pay much attention to what goes on inside the compound, long as there ain't much trouble. How would you like to get in on it?"

"You mean, what I heard about outside?"

"Yeah, I guess there are rumors. Transferred guards, you know how it is. Can I trust you, Mayhem?"

"This was your idea, not mine."

"O.K., O.K. See me after work call tomorrow, willya?"

Mayhem said that he would, and Walker dismissed him. The barracks were dark now, heavy black drapes drawn over the tinted windows. Mayhem thought he saw some figures crouching in the shadows near his bunk. Dead tired, he climbed in.

There was a stirring around his bed—the sound bare feet might make on the floor. Instantly, he was alert, sitting up, his eyes opening wide in an attempt to pierce the darkness. Something struck his forehead and he heard a sharp intake of breath. Cursing, he swung his feet toward the edge of the bed, but was beaten back by a second, harder blow.

All at once a heavy blanket fell over him like an encumbering cloak. He struck out blindly with arms and legs, but the blanket hindered him. A rain of blows struck him through the blanket—his head, shoulders, chest, belly, legs. He curled up in an effort to protect himself. Someone had drawn the ends of the blanket together; he was constricted inside it.

A hard blow struck the base of his skull. His senses reeled. It was the blanket treatment, he realized dimly. It had been a part of prison life almost since pre-history.

It was inmate-administered punishment. In the morning, no one knew who was responsible.

Mayhem got one arm suddenly free of the blanket, felt a keen sense of satisfaction as he groped and then struck with the balled fist, the contact being rewarded by a groan of pain. But the rain of blows did not lessen. His free arm was grasped, twisted. His head reeled from fresh blows, reeled and slowly entered a dark funnel at the bottom of which was a shining whirlpool of brilliant light . . .

When he awoke, it was morning. He ached all over and wondered if any bones had been broken. Gingerly he tested first his arms, then his legs. He sat up and waited for the abrupt wave of dizziness to wash over him. He ached from a dozen bruises and swellings, but all his bones seemed intact.

Pitapin sat up in the next bunk, but would not look at him. Mayhem wondered if first call had sounded, then saw the still sleepy-eyed men drifting toward the latrine and knew it had. All of them avoided him completely, so Mayhem got up and went to the latrine himself, where

cold water did much to help his bruised face and body.

Ten minutes later, Walker came in. When he saw Mayhem he whistled, shook his head and said, "What the hell happened to you?"

Everyone else was suddenly very quiet. "Blanket treatment," Mayhem said promptly, knowing this would be the final necessary step in cementing his relationship with Walker. "These rats got me last night because I happened to agree with you a couple of times."

"Want to report it?" Walker asked.

Mayhem pretended to consider, then shook his head. He had nothing against the cons; he had looked for trouble; ostracism and the blanket treatment were to be expected. "Not me," he said finally. "I've still got to live with them. Don't I?"

"For now," Walker said, grinning at him. "Cadres are always getting busted around here. They always need new cadres. How would you like that?"

Mayhem nodded enthusiastically.

"Well, I'll recommend you when an opening comes along," Walker said. "Meanwhile, we got a vacant cadre-room upstairs which I figure

you ought to bed down in from now on. There's a lock on the door, if you see what I mean."

Mayhem thanked him, but could almost feel the others' hatred as something palpable in the hot, sultry air. He dressed and ate breakfast and only dimly remembered the long work shift that day. Any other man, his body almost entirely covered with bruises and blue marks, would not have been able to function at all. But Mayhem, whose sentience controlled a body but did not actually co-exist with it, could let his mind drift until pain receded, until physical awareness itself became dim and remote, until he was suspended from his physical self by no more than the thread of muscle control as he toiled over the pneumatic drill.

Finally, the supper whistle sounded. Mayhem was aware of stooped, tired figures all around him ceasing their efforts. He went on with his own mechanically, the drill bucking against his hands, and slowly brought himself back from his private limbo. Only then did he stop working. His body was a single burning ache. He staggered toward the water bucket and

would have fallen, but Pitapin grabbed and supported him. "Damn you," Pitapin said. "I guess I owed you that for what you did the first day. But keep away from me in the future."

Far behind the others, Mayhem staggered back to the barracks and stretched out on his bunk. He did not join the chow line because he lacked the strength to get up. He drifted off into an uneasy slumber but awoke a few moments later feeling the pressure of a hand on his shoulder.

It was Pitapin. "Hurry up," the breed said. "Take off your clothes. I got some ointment from the infirmary that ought to help you, but I don't want the others to know."

Mayhem stripped off his shirt. "Well, thank you—"

"Shut up. Don't thank me. I still remember what you did for me. That's why I'm doing it, understand? I'm not doing it for what you're like now, you can bet on that. Just shut up and let's get it finished."

Ten minutes later, the soothing balm took effect. Mayhem's sore muscles felt wonderfully cool, almost refreshed. He thanked Pitapin again, but the breed merely grumbled something and walked away from his bunk.

Mayhem sat up, shrugging. None of the others had returned from chow yet. Shoudering his shirt like a cape, Mayhem approached Walker's cadrerroom.

He knocked on the door and opened it. Walker's big body was stretched out on the bunk. Walker was smoking a cigarette and staring up with almost mournful attentiveness at a wall lined with pin-up pictures.

"Look at that stuff, will-ya?" the big man said.

"About what you said yesterday—" Mayhem began.

"I ain't forgot, con. I only figured you was too beat up to go tonight."

"Not me," said Mayhem.

"O.K. Meet me at the south airlock in ten minutes. I'll have a couple of asbesulta, the guard kind, with radio so we can talk. See what it is to be a cadreman?"

"Yeah," Mayhem said with what he hoped was the proper amount of awe. He went back to his bunk and waited five minutes, then got up and slipped outside. Night was a purely arbitrary designation on Mercury, which always kept one side toward the sun. But it was night within the barracks, thanks to heavily tinted windows and thick drapes. Outside, the eternal

sun shone down mercilessly through the tinted dome.

Sunside Penal during its arbitrary night period looked like a ghost city. Neither cons nor cadre nor guards were to be seen on its silent streets, although an occasional strain of music or sound of laughter drifted, ghost-like, from one of the barracks buildings. Once Mayhem saw a single guard patrolling near the periphery of the dome. Mayhem ducked quickly into the shadow of one of the barracks. The guard was a mere formality, since there was no place the prisoners could escape to, even in an asbesuit. But Mayhem would be unable to explain his own presence on the street.

He waited a moment, listening to the fading sound of the guard's footsteps, and then headed silently but swiftly toward the south airlock and Walker.

And Walker's secret.

Mayhem did not allow himself the luxury of a guess. He hoped he would learn the answer before the night was over. At least his mission would succeed to that extent . . .

"Hey, I'm over here!" a voice called.

It was Walker, with two bulky asbesuits at his feet.

The dome of Sunside Penal was behind them now, a great blue bubble on the parched white Mercurian surface. Ahead was white rock and fiery red rock and the gleaming lakes of molten metal.

"Can you hear me?" Walker's voice crackled over the intercom.

"Yes. The radio works fine."

"Sometimes it don't on account of sun static," Walker said. "We're lucky."

They walked on for some time in silence, then Walker's voice bridged the static again. "I'll bet you been wondering," he said. "Well, listen, con. Did you pay any attention to the life sentence they read you when you got sent here?"

"No," Mayhem replied. "Who does?" Mayhem, of course, had been given no sentence at all.

"I guess you're right. But you know what it says? It don't say for life, even though it's a life sentence. It's only a technicality, but it says—*for a hundred years*. Keep that in mind, Tobay."

"What is this, a guessing game?" Mayhem demanded as they walked on. They seemed to be heading toward an outcropping of slate gray rock which reared above the

white Mercurian surface. Mayhem could not tell how far it was because the close Mercurian horizon played hob with distance judgment.

"Not exactly. Did you ever hear of the *knuurs*?"

Mayhem nodded. "Some kind of Mercurian animal, isn't it? The only fauna on Mercury, a kind of reptile with a hide like asbestos?"

"You got it," Walker said. "Know anything funny about the *knuurs*?"

"Well, they have a very long life span. Don't they?"

"Yeah," said Walker eagerly. "Nobody ever knew how long. There are a few in captivity on Venus, the story goes. And they been waiting to see when the *knuurs* died of old age. They're still waiting. You know how long they been on Venus?"

"No."

"Two hundred years," Walker said, almost devoutly.

"Two hundred—!"

"That's what I said. Funny thing was, the zoologists couldn't figure why. There was nothing in the *knuurs*' makeup to explain why they should live so long. The zoologists finally figured it was something they ate."

"Something they ate?"

"Yeah. Something they ate here on Mercury. One dose

was all they needed, see, because the ones we Earthmen got are on Venus now. Something they ate, Tobay. You understand? Something they ate on Mercury." Walker's voice was almost a whisper. "We found it. Some of us cons found it."

Mayhem said nothing.

"An elixir of life, Tobay! You know what that means to us? You figure it out, con. A guy's a crook. Sooner or later, he's gonna get caught, but he can't be sure if they'll send him to Sunside Penal here on Mercury or to the asteroids. The grapevine tells where the openings are, see? When you know the opening's on Mercury, you let yourself get caught and they send you here for life. Now do you see?"

"But—"

"But nothing, con. The sentence is life in prison, they think. But it don't read that way. It reads *for a hundred years*. How old am I, Tobay? How old do I look?"

"I don't know. Thirty? Thirty-five?"

"I'm sixty-seven. I've been here forty years."

"You're joking."

"I wouldn't joke about a thing like this."

"But sixty-seven—"

"The elixir of life! What's a hundred years if you're gonna live for ever? Another sixty years from now, when my sentence is up, I'll still look thirty-five. I'll feel thirty-five. And I'll be a free man. Free, Tobay. With no strings attached. I'm not alone, either. There are a hundred of us here, in on the secret. We want recruits, because when we get out of here, we're gonna organize the biggest cartel of crime the Solar System ever saw."

That part of it sounded far-fetched to Mayhem. A hundred years was a long time. A hundred years in Sunside Penal would not equip a man for a successful life of crime, despite what Walker thought. But if the convicts and Sunside Penal had discovered an elixir of life as Walker claimed, the Galactic League should learn about it, should use the elixir as it saw fit...

"Here we are," said Walker in the same devout voice. "On top of that pile of rocks. We don't even know what the stuff is, but it tastes metallic. Anyhow, I guess you're gonna take some back for yourself. Ain't you?"

They stood at the base of the outcropping of rock. Mayhem began to climb but suddenly felt himself shaken. He

fell down alongside Walker, who was laughing. "Earthquake," the big cadreman said. "Or maybe I should say mercquake. They're common around here. Just hold on tight on your way up, there you go."

They ascended the steep slope in silence. Mayhem peered down into a spring, in which a silvery liquid bubbled. He watched Walker stretch out full length on a flat slab of rock and reach down with his asbesuited arms. He brought up a small flask, dripping, full of the silvery liquid. He capped it. "This is yours," he said, giving the flask to Mayhem.

Mayhem pocketed the flask, smiling grimly. The radio imbedded in his inner ear wouldn't do much good now, he thought. He'd have to return successfully to the outside world—with his flask...

Walker was descending the slope ahead of him, beckoning. But Mayhem turned for one last look at the pool, which bubbled and frothed in its rocky cauldron. Something moved swiftly to his left. A small reptilian form — a *kawur*. It went right on over the edge of the cauldron, disappeared under the surface of the silvery liquid. Soon it re-

appeared, shaking its pointed snout and bobbing like a cork on the heavy silvery liquid. It climbed out of the pool and streaked away.

"Are you coming?" Walker's voice called over the radio.

Mayhem said that he was. Walker was already at the base of the outcropping of rock and walking away from it. Mayhem took a step down toward him.

The ground heaved.

Mayhem felt himself pitching forward, head over heels. Walker's figure, two dozen feet below him, seemed to tilt crazily, as if the Mercurian horizon was suddenly rising to meet the zenith of the planet's sky. The ground shook again. A fissure opened at Mayhem's feet.

He leaped to clear it, felt one of his legs dragged back. Then, abruptly, as if a giant hand had lifted him, he was hurled high into the air and seemed to float down toward Walker. He struck jarringly.

He blacked out.

"He's coming around now," a voice said.

Another voice, deeper: "It's a miracle. We don't have the facilities to treat a case like that here. It's a miracle he survived."

Mayhem opened his eyes. He could see nothing. Alarm must have showed on his face, because the deeper voice said, "Don't worry, you aren't blind. It's dark in the room."

"What happened?" Mayhem said.

"I'm Dr. Gilody. Severe concussion, my boy. You're lucky to be alive. You were in coma for some time."

"Did Cadremar Walker bring me in?"

"Why, no," Dr. Gilody said. "Should he have?"

"I don't know. Who did?" Naturally, it would not have been Walker. Walker had his own skin to worry about. Besides, Walker might have been caught going outside illegally if he had to return with Mayhem's injured body.

"That's the amazing part of it," Gilody said. "No one brought you in. You came in yourself, then collapsed. You don't remember, do you?"

"No," Mayhem admitted.

"It was as if your mind only controlled the motor areas of your brain but did not feel the terrible pain which must have been gripping you. I've never seen a case like it before. I would have sworn it was impossible, until I saw it with my own eyes."

Mayhem knew the answer, but did not explain. He was Johnny Mayhem. He resided in his body; he did not co-exist with it. He said, "I was in coma?"

"Yes. There was slight pressure on the brain. I performed an operation. You'll be all right now. Except for the operation, the only cure was rest. We did not try to get you out of coma. We let nature take its course. Nurse, you can remove the first layer of drapes slowly."

Mayhem sat up as faint gray light filtered into the room. The nurse and the middle-aged doctor were smiling at each other. All at once, Mayhem scowled, "How long have I been in coma?" he asked.

"It's always a shock when the patient finds out," Gilody said. "He can't believe he's been under that long. Are you sure you want me to tell you now?"

"Yes. I'm sure." Mayhem was holding his breath.

Dr. Gilody said, "Just short of three weeks."

"Three weeks! Then that means I've been at Sunside—"

"Almost a month," Dr. Gilody finished for him.

Mayhem stood up, staggering.

"Get back in bed, young

man," the nurse said. "You can't walk around like that."

Mayhem ignored her, turned to Gilody. "I've got to get out of here."

Gilody looked at him coldly. "This is a prison hospital, Tobay. You don't 'got to do' anything. You do as you're told. Now, go back to bed."

The elderly nurse, the only woman Mayhem had seen at Sunside, took one of his arms. Dr. Gilody took the other. They convoyed him back to bed. The nurse tucked the covers up to his neck, then closed the drape. Darkness engulfed Mayhem. He was about to sit up again when something pricked his arm. Instantly, he slept.

He awoke feeling very hungry. Memory returned and he sat bolt upright. At most, he had hours. Hours and then—death. It was utterly quiet in the infirmary. Mayhem stood up, padded barefoot to the door, opened it. The dull electric light in the corridor was enough to dazzle his eyes. The corridor was windowless, but he could see perpetual Mercurian daylight streaming in from an open doorway a hundred feet down the hall. His legs trembling with weakness, he headed in that direction.

A normal man couldn't escape from Sunside Penal, he thought. A normal man wouldn't have a chance. But Johnny Mayhem, with luck . . .

"Where are you going?" a voice called. It was Dr. Gilody. Mayhem flattened himself against the wall, but Gilody came toward him in the dim light. "Tobay, isn't it? What's the matter with you? The average con would give his eye-teeth to spend a few weeks resting in the infirmary. We have more gold-bricking than we can handle. But you, with the opportunity, reject it—"

"Sorry, Doc," Mayhem said, and hit the doctor in the face with his right fist. Gilody merely shook the blow off and grasped Mayhem with both hands. Mayhem smiled. He had not realized how weak he was, after three weeks of coma—

"Guard!" Dr. Gilody belatedly, holding Mayhem in a bear-hug.

Mayhem hit him again, expertly this time, with the edge of his palm, striking for the nerve behind the doctor's ear. Gilody sighed and crumpled to the floor. Footsteps pounded down the corridor, but Mayhem was already outside. Panting, he ran up the deserted street. Apparently, it

was night. Did he have hours—or only minutes? Was this really the end of the Johnny Mayhem legend?

He rounded a corner on the dead run and almost collided with cadreman Walker, who was carrying a deflated asbesuit. "Holy Mac," Walker cried, "I thought you was dead."

They stood near a foundation excavation, the hard Mercurian rock broken into jagged chunks. Mayhem reached down, found a heavy stone and struck at Walker's face with it. Walker's scream became a gurgle. One side of his face seemed oddly flattened as he fell. Mayhem regretted this, but Walker was no great loss to society.

Quickly, Mayhem climbed into the asbesuit, inflating it before it was fully sealed. He did not know if Walker was returning from the outside with an almost exhausted suit or heading for it with a full one. He had no time to find out.

He sprinted on trembling legs for the south airlock, waited a breathless moment while the guard marched by with his electron rifle, then went outside.

He began the long walk to the guard station, six miles away. If the asbesuit had not

been used, he could reach it on foot. But when he got there, the insulating liquid would almost be exhausted. Mayhem frowned, wondering if he were heading to his death. Because he wanted the suit's insulating liquid to be exhausted. It was his one hope . . .

The intense Mercurian heat was already seeping inside his suit by the time he neared the guard station's small domed compound. He thought: the infirmary at Sunside wouldn't be able to handle a really bad burn case. A really bad burn case would have to be returned to Galactic League Center . . .

Slowly, Mayhem felt himself being broiled. An ordinary man would die—but Mayhem was not an ordinary man. He let his mind drift, felt the shackles of his temporary body slipping. Soon the fierce heat seemed to leave him, but it was only subjective. In reality, the body was being broiled alive, slowly. Mayhem felt no pain. Mayhem now governed only the body's motor impulses—

When he thought the body could take no more, he made his way slowly toward the station dome. Outside, he saw a large supply jet, upended

and ready for blastoff. He turned on the suit radio and began to call for help. Soon he was vaguely aware of figures approaching him. He was grabbed, dragged toward the dome. There was a confusion of sound, of feeling, of pain which ebbed and flowed.

"Look at him! Burned alive."

"I never saw anything like it. A mass of blisters from head to foot."

"They couldn't do a thing for him back at Sunside. Well, he's as good as dead anyhow, poor devil."

". . . might be able to send him back on the supply ship."

". . . not a chance he'll live . . ."

"Anyway. What do you say?"

"All right, I guess."

Mayhem sighed and fainted.

"Some people are lucky."

It was Firstman O'Halrohan's voice.

Mayhem sat up. He was naked, and the body he inhabited felt unfamiliar. "Mercury's frozen storage body?" he guessed.

"Right," said Firstman O'Halrohan. "When they brought someone in who'd been burned almost to a cinder, I figured it might be you."

We couldn't save Tobay's body, but there was time enough to switch you to this new body. You're a lucky man, Mayhem."

"I guess so."

"Hell, I'll admit it. You're not lucky. You escaped, all right. You wanted to burn like that, didn't you?"

"Yes. It was the only way."

"Well, far as I'm concerned, Sunside is still escape-proof. Because only Johnny Mayhem could have done it."

Mayhem stood up. "About the elixir—"

"Yes, the elixir. You were babbling about it deliriously. We sent a team of scientists out, but the earthquake had completely buried the spring.

We'll never know whether that thing was really the fountain of youth or not."

"Maybe it's better that way," Mayhem said.

"Maybe. Incidentally, we're making a technical change in the prison sentences. A hundred years is now 'life.' "

"But it can't be ex post facto, can it?"

"I guess not."

"What about those who already took the elixir?"

O'Halrohan smiled. "A hundred years is a long time, Mayhem. Why don't we let our grandchildren's grandchildren worry about it?"

Mayhem smiled back at him. "Why don't we?" he said.

THE END

ALIAS JANE DOE

"Never mind," she said gently and drew him close to her. "You have been very clever to find out all this about me. And whom have you told about it?"

"Nobody — yet — Jane. I — couldn't. I guess that's because—I love you."

"I love you, too," she said, and she kissed him.

Two weeks later the *Greenhorn Record* reported the discovery of the body of twenty-

(Concluded from page 61)

eight-year-old Wilmer Geer by a forest ranger at the foot of Greenhorn Mountain fire station. The condition of the body, said the paper, led the coroner to attribute Mr. Geer's death to but one cause: he'd been struck by lightning.

In the same edition of the paper, a one-paragraph item informed its readers that Jane Doe had been elected the first girl president of the student body of Greenhorn High School.

THE END

...OR SO YOU SAY



BY THE READERS

Dear Ed:

What in the devil has happened? In my meager eight years of reading S-F lit. in which I buy everything that I can get my hands on, I have never seen an editor get so egotistical. I would even go as far as to say in your own words that you are an egoboo.

Naturally you want to know why I say this. And I wouldn't have started this thing if I didn't intend to do just exactly that. You are the first Ed. that I have ever seen that has told the reader to drop dead in his own column. Enough said.

So you don't agree with what the readers say. SO WHAT? You are *supposed* to have more tact and common sense than to act the way you have been the past six months or so. Since when has the editor had to call down a reader when he is wrong in the S-F field? It seems to me the other readers have taken very good care of that job in the past, so why be a fool and try to change things now? That way, if the other readers agree with him, you know or at least you should know that he is right.

Surely you don't think you know your readers, do you? You apparently think you do. But the above says what I think on that.

Now as for you saying that today's S-F is faster than the old brand. I wish that you would go to the trouble of going back a few years and read, "The Lens Man, the Gray Lens Man and the children of the Lens". I am proud to say that I have had the pleasure of reading all of them. In case you are inter-

ested of course, it was published by *Astounding*. Carried more plot and more science theory, than anything I have read in this mag of yours.

Not that I don't enjoy *Amazing*, because I do. I think it is one of the top mags on the stands today. It is just that I *don't like you*, or at least your attitude towards your readers. If you keep it up, I doubt if you shall ever obtain the 100,000 letter writers that you referred to way back in Sept., 1955. Much less the 1 dollar bill in each letter.

Dan (Prof.) Wilhite
Denver, Colo.

• *Okay, let's get this straight: is it your opinion that the editor of a magazine is to have no opinions of his own; that he is expected to agree (or rather not to disagree) with any statement in letters from the readers? This is your idea of "tact" and "common sense"?*

Well, it's not your editor's idea, Prof. In the first place, these letters are addressed to the editor—not to the other readers. The editor of this magazine believes in the things he does; maybe that doesn't make him right but it does make him sincere. When a reader takes him to task for something which the reader believes is wrong, the editor comes back with a rebuttal. If you want a panty-waist, a yes-man, as the editor of the magazine you read, then you're reading the wrong magazine. It might interest you to know that yours is the first letter we've received expressing this kind of reaction. Let's find out how other readers feel about the matter.—ED.

Dear Editor:

This is the first letter I have ever written to you, but perhaps not the last. I am not actually a steady reader of your magazine, but am in the habit of picking up a copy on the newsstand whenever there is a good cover or a big name author. I have watched the growth of *Amazing* with an impartial eye. Reading S-F was not a habit back in the early days when Hugo Gernsback edited the mag, but I wish I had known about it—to give it my support. You have come a long way since then and most of *Amazing's* companion mags have fallen into oblivion. *Amazing*, though has survived the race and will probably continue to do so.

By now you are probably tired of congratulations on your change and restoration of departments, but here is another one. Fandom has an old familiar friend back now, and a sounding board in the form of a letter column.

Incidentally, I have some books I would like to sell, and a postcard brings a list by return mail to anyone interested.

George Spencer
8302 Donnybrook Lane
Chevy Chase, 15, Md.

• *Thank you, George Spencer. We never get tired of congratulations. You see, we get so few of 'em.*—ED.

Dear Howard:

I like the new policy of your magazines fairly well, but I feel cheated. 100 pages of fiction in large type is too little for 35¢. I would like to see a much smaller letter column and only three or four pages of book and fanzine reviews—perhaps ten pages of features at the very most, to include more fiction. If you used a slightly smaller size of type you'd be able to give us more of our money's worth too. 29 pages of features as in the September *Amazing* is just too much of a good thing. Cut the letter column to five pages tops, and perhaps run the fan and book columns in alternating issues now that you're monthly.

I like most of the stories these days, though I wish some of them were more scientific. Among those I recall in the last year as better than usual were John Polard's "Call Him Savage," Randall Garrett's "The Woman Driver," and Milton Lesser's "The Rusted Jungle." I'd like to see more stories from these authors. And I can't wait for the word that *Fantastic*, too, will go monthly and we'll have our Z-D monthly twins again!

Jerry Bruskin
621 Crown St.
Brooklyn, N. Y.

• *We're making some changes along the lines you suggest, Jerry. "The Revolving Fan" department will appear on alternate months with "The Spectroscope"—and the readers' letters department will be cut back drastically. As for cutting down on the type size—huh-uh. Legibility makes for easy reading—and a good story always reads better when it is easy to read.*

. . . Pollard, Lesser and Garrett—all will be back, probably many times.—ED.

Dear Mr. Browne:

Your November issue of *Amazing* was superb. It was so good that I couldn't pick a best story. I was glad to see that you seemingly took the advice of some of your many fans, including myself, to add more illos between the covers. I like it, the fans like it, KEEP IT UP !!!

After reading some of the criticisms from readers of AS and its stories I got to thinking, why not let some of these "expert" critics write what they think are better stories and submit them to you for your more experienced opinion? If they met your approval you could print it—if they didn't you could make some of these birds eat their own words with hot mustard. It sounds fair enough and would start a lot of S-F fans thinking. How about it, HB, any chance?

I wholeheartedly disagree with Mr. Jay C. Franklin's dislike for action in S-F mags. A science-fiction fan is a person who, if they are any kind of a fan at all, will like simplicity rather than sophistication. Sophistication tends to make a story long and boring, tiring to the reader's mind as he is trying to grasp the author's trend of thought. Simplicity will keep the reader's mind at ease because he can readily follow the author's thoughts as well as keep up with the action. Remember, action makes the story exciting.

Lance C. Barland
35 E. Market St.
West Chester, Pa.

• *Your second paragraph, Lance, isn't the way we look at it at all. It's all a matter of taste, as the old woman said when she kissed the cow. You don't have to be a writer to judge the merits of a story—when the judgment is a matter of personal taste. We never heard of a piece of fiction that everybody liked just as we never heard of a story nobody liked.*—ED.

Dear Mr. Browne:

Just finished your November issue. (By the way, how do you people figure months? It's still August here.) After reading my letter and your answer, I'd best straighten out two points—

First—I am Mrs. Clark, known as Pat to my friends.

Second—It's Fantasy and Science Fiction I save, not AS-F—That makes me a slightly different type person, doesn't it?

Enjoyed this issue muchly. Interesting cover, *mod* editorial, and three very good short stories. But that long story—seemed more like a satire on an adventure story. It was so good-versus-bad. Good adventure doesn't have to read like soap-opera script, does it?

More Johnny Mayhem, please? Him I like. And "The Man in the Ice Box"—what a beautiful story. Amusing, sympathetic, interesting. Couldn't we have more short stories? Since you like to have your stories rated—"Man in the Ice Box" first—"They Sent a Boy" and "Let's Do It Again" both running close seconds, and "Beyond the Steel Wall" way down there. It was a good idea, but I ended up laughing instead of relieved at the end.

Only one cartoon? I'm disappointed.

I'll be looking forward to your next issue.

Mrs. Pat Clark
Box 426
College, Alaska

• *Okay, Pat—it's Mrs. Pat. . . . We were almost overly fond of "The Man in the Icebox" ourselves; usually that means a lot of readers won't like the story. . . . We've got three or four more of the "Johnny Mayhem" series all written and ready to go. . . . —ED.*

Dear HB:

This is my first, and more than likely my last letter to you, but I had to tell you what a shnook I think this James Lewis is: (Re: His definition of a "fan" in the Sept. issue). I discovered my face had worked itself into one of its best sneers by the time I had finished his letter.

I read every S-F mag I can buy or borrow, but when it comes to publishing a fanzine or attending conventions and the like, you've lost me. I'm a housewife with a small baby to take care of. Yet I spend almost all of my spare time with S-F mags. If, in his opinion, I am not a fan, then what am I? (I guess I've left myself open on that one.) I applauded, mentally, your reply.

While I'm at it, please don't listen to those boobs who want the return of the large size mag. I always carry one of your mags with me, to read on the bus, at the beach, while walking the baby, and every other chance I get. I can see me trying to stuff one of those large mags into my diaper bag. Fooey!

I love your stories, your illos, your cartoons and everything else about your mag—including you. No kicks whatever.

Sherry Burns

7903 So. Calumet Ave.

Chicago, 19, Ill.

** Believe us, Sherry, you're a fan—and we wish there were a million like you! Mr. Lewis is, we're certain, a sincere young man who expressed his sincere belief—right or wrong. Perhaps he'll wish to reply to your letter through this column. We'll print it.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

For a number of years I have been reading your S-F, and have finally called upon myself to voice an opinion. Before we get into my review, I would like to ask for some addresses on requests for subscriptions, and letters to the editor. I don't believe I have ever seen the correct address, and possibly others would like to express their thoughts, but not know where to send them. Maybe I am behind in not knowing, but then one must start somewhere and this is my start.

As to when I started on my quest for reading of a different nature, I would say about the time your first story of, "Adam the Robot" appeared and I have been a reader since. The change to the present size has appealed to me and I believe makes for a better mag, but why so much space for departments? I myself, and others for that matter, enjoy the comments of readers, but why clutter up your book review with such lengthy comments? A short summary is fine, but better to let the reader decide on the author's shortcomings.

To keep in line with normal readers' letters, my thoughts on your Nov., '55, issue follow as such:

"Beyond the Steel Wall," Ira Kendahl, is possibly number one, although I feel that the hero of the story overdid his part, but never-the-less, a good finish.

"They Sent a Boy." CH Thames, delves in a field that could

produce some good stories. I'm inclined to enjoy that line, and Johnny Mayhem stands high on my list.

"The Man in the Ice Box," Paul Fairman, visitations from other beings to Earth brings in the imagination and however written can be interesting.

"Let's Do It Again," Ivar Jorgensen, can they ever come up with a good time travel story? Maybe I have missed a good one in that line, but this one is not on my list as good.

So much for my comments, but then I fell to the idea, and having expressed myself, I am looking forward to read other letters from S-F fans, and please hope you keep the stories up to par. You can't please everyone, but you try.

J. Duayne Hoskin

13409 Maple Valley Hiway
Renton, Washington

• *Nothing much for us to comment on in your letter, J. D. As already mentioned, we're cutting down on the length of the departments and their frequency. . . . You'll find the address of our subscription department on the foot of the inside front cover—and letters to the editor should be sent to: Amazing Stories, 366 Madison Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

I want to express my general agreement with the comments made by Messrs. Ken Rose, P. A. Clark, Edward Wood and John Trimble in the readers' column of the current November issue.

I, too, am an old-time reader of S-F and I've been reading all types of S-F and fantastic stories since getting my reporter's card from Hugo Gernsback in 1926. I buy for the stories, read the editor's column and scientific articles on the facts or speculation. But I'd prefer to see the letter columns and reviews dropped in favor of another story. I have no interest in fan magazines, fan clubs or book reviews . . .

I like stories like the "SLAN" series and those that Eric Temple Bell wrote. Perhaps they were in other magazines but I'm sure you know them. I like authors who have either scientific training or good story-telling ability—preferably both. Too many authors of recent years seem to think an unfamiliar background makes it a scientific setting, and let imagination

rush on without even the sense that a single high school science course should give. They substitute magic for science without attempting to understand either one.

H. C. Speel
Hotel Niagara

• *A great many readers like, and want, the very departments you suggest dropping, Mr. Speel. For a long time these same departments were suspended; but when enough readers put on the pressure—as they did in this case—something had to give. We gave. . . . We put story first, science second. Why? Well, that takes us back to reader reaction again.—ED.*

HOLE IN THE AIR

else. And I'll get it from them. I'll exchange. For the mutual benefit of the world next door and Earth. For the mutual benefit of Amalgamated Technologicals and Derke Berish.

"I'm going through," he said, and did.

Ronnie and Condon waited patiently in the alleyway for Berish's return, as an hour passed, then two. They kept a constant vigil for the rest of the day and finally, late in the evening, a figure stepped through the gateway.

"Here he is!" cried Ronnie. But it was not Berish. It was purple-green in color, had a dozen undulating arms, a single big eye at the top of its body, and a tight slit of a mouth under the eye. In one arm it held outstretched one of the otherworld marbles.

(Concluded from page 71)

Greetings, came its thought. Condon stared at the alien in horror.

I am your exchange, the alien projected. We have received your specimen, and we joy in his complexity. He has been an object of much interest. I have been selected in reciprocation.

"Welcome," Condon said, backing up a bit, wondering what had happened to Berish. "You're in exchange? For Berish?"

Yes. And I am, like him, an exceptionally curious person. For this reason, I ask that you grant me the same favor which my people granted him.

"What's that?" Condon said.

The single big eye of the alien gleamed. *That, before you dissect me, you allow me to see some of your world,* the thought came.

THE END